

THE
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Hudson
REVIEW

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C. Musonius Rufus—a story

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS:

Rags, Garbage, and Fantasy

PAUL VALERY:

Sketch of a Serpent—a new translation

SONYA RUDIKOFF:

Empress of Calvary

JAMES P. DEGNAN:

Career Drinking in San Francisco

Poems by JAMES BAKER HALL, DOROTHY ROBERTS,
DAVE SMITH, KATHLEEN SPIVACK, PETER H. LEE,
ANNE S. PERLMAN.

Reviews by RICHMOND LATTIMORE, GRACE SCHULMAN,
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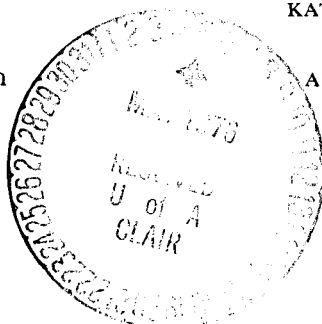
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To Our Readers

Two new books by an editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW have recently been published. In accordance with our policy, they will not be reviewed in these pages, but are listed here for the interest of our readers:

JOHN SIMON: *Singularities; Essays on the Theater 1964-1974*. Random House. \$12.95 cloth; \$4.95 paper. *Uneasy Stages: A Chronicle of the New York Theater, 1963-1973*. Random House. \$15.00 cloth; \$4.95 paper.

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by J. H. Matthews.

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PAUL VALÉRY

Sketch of a Serpent

—*Translated by Jan Schreiber*

Deep in the tree the breeze
Rocks the viper I wear;
A smile pierced by a fang
Shining with appetite
Infects the Garden air.
My emerald triangle
Darts out its double tongue . . .
A beast, yes—but acute,
Whose venom, although vile,
Leaves the wise hemlock dumb.

Sweet days are ripening.
Tremble, mortals—I'm strong
When my insatiate yawn
Stretches to snap a spring.
The azure splendors stir
The reptile hiding me
In brute simplicity.
Come, sluggish human swarm,
I am erect and warm,
Tuned to necessity!

Sun, sun . . . bedazzling fault
And mask of death—ah, Sun—
Beneath a blue-gold vault
Where waves of flowers run:
Proudest conspirator
And highest of my snares,
You by opaque delights
See that men shall not see
That all creation blights
Non-being's purity.

Great Sun, who rouse all being
And temper it with fire,

Who close it with a sleep
Painted with bright deceit;
Poser of phantom scenes
That make the soul's obscure
Presence at once seem plain,
I've always liked the lie
You give the absolute,
Prince of the shades of flame!

Pour me your savage heat:
Caught in cold lassitude
I dream of tragedy
Subtly enlaced like me.
This sweet place that saw flesh
Fall and couple is dear!
My fury ripens here.
I nourish it and grow
Alert, and through my coils
My meditations flow.

O Vanity! First Cause!
He who reigns in heaven
With words made out of light
Opened the universe
Bored by his pure tableau,
God became He who mars
His own perfection. Hence
He saw his Principle
Dispersed in consequence,
His Unity in stars.

Heaven his error, time
His ruin. Brute abyss
Gapes! What primal fall gleams
In place of nothingness!
But the first breath of his Word
Was ME! The grandest star
The mad creator spoke.
I am! I shall be! I

Light up his waning sky
With the Seducer's fire!

Bright object of my hate
Whom I loved with abandon,
Who owed dominion over
Gehenna to this lover,
Look deeply in my shade:
Your tragic image there,
The pride of my dark mirror,
So tortured you, the air
You breathed upon the clay
Was your sigh of despair.

In vain you shaped from mud
Your infant artifacts
Who offer day-long praise
To your triumphant acts.
Once shaped, once breathed, with hisses
Master Snake addresses
Your pretty votaries:
Hello there, new arrivals!
You people are bare naked,
You blessèd, pallid beasts!

Made in that loathed image!
I hate you as I hate
The Name that could create
All these flawed prodigies.
I'm He who modifies;
I retouch trusting hearts
With sure, mysterious sense.
We'll change these flaccid works,
These slippery garden snakes,
To reptiles of revenge!

My vast intelligence
Plucks in the souls of men
A vengeful instrument

Assembled by your hands.
Father, hid by the immense
Bright chamber of the sky
From all things but incense,
Still you are troubled by
The abundance of my charms
Raising distant alarms.

I come, go, glide, and plunge
Into the simple heart.
What breast could be so hard
As to resist a dream?
Stranger, do I not seem
The happiness that dawns
When your soul loves itself?
Just so I am at base
The inimitable taste
You find in your own mouth.

Eve, long ago, I once
Surprised in her first thoughts,
Her lips parted to spirits
Born of the nodding rose.
I found her perfect, bare
Thighs bright as gold, whom man
Nor sunlight could abash,
All offered to the air—
The soul still stupid, still
Held at the door of flesh.

O mass of blessedness,
So beautiful, fit prize
For the attentiveness
Of spirits far more wise;
They hover at your lips
Drawn by your gentle sighs.
The purest suffer worst,
The hardest are most hurt—
And I—you stir my heart
From whom the vampires rise!

Yes! From my leafy lair,
A reptile with a bird's
Bliss, while my babbled words
Wove you a net of ploys,
I drank you, heedless beauty.
Calm, clear, your charms so heavy—
How my furtive eye toys
With your bright burning hair,
Your enigmatic nape
That hints your moving shape!

Present like an odor,
The scent of an idea
Whose insidious depth
One never quite discerns!
I disturbed you, candor,
Weakly determined flesh,
And still you did not weave
Fearfully into splendor.
Yet I shall have you—even
Now your color turns!

(Superb simplicity
Commands its own renown.
Its seeming clarity,
Its bliss, stupidity
And pride defend the town.
Let's try to bring it down,
And by this rarest art
Solicit the pure heart.
This is my strength, my wit;
I'm end and means of it!)

Now, out of sparkling drivel
Weave the delicate systems
Where gentle Eve, the sluggard,
Will meet with some vague hazard.
Beneath that silken snare
Watch her skin tremble there,

The prey disquieted.
There is no finer lace,
No surer hidden thread,
Than my quick shuttles trace.

Gild, tongue! Gild tales for her
As soft as you can find!
Allusions, subtleties,
And chiselled silences—
All to disturb her mind.
Flatter and coax her till
She's lost in my designs,
Brought meek to streams that spill
From heaven's precipice
Into the blue abyss!

O language without peer!
What spirit I've poured in
The downy labyrinth
Of that amazing ear!
And nothing's lost, I know.
What strikes the suspended soul
Tells—as long as my words,
Bees in the petal's fold
Probing the heart's rich hoard,
Cleave to the ear of gold.

"Nothing's less sure," I breathed,
"Than God's pronouncement, Eve.
Live knowledge must exceed
The enormity of this fruit.
Ignore the old Absolute
Who cursed the smallest bite.
But should your mouth conceive
A thirst that longs to receive
This half-withheld delight—
All time's dissolved here, Eve!"

She drank my little words

That built a curious house.
Her eye would leave an angel
To come back to my boughs.
This most dissembling beast
Who laughs at you for being
So hard—O great with evil!—
Is but a voice in the green.
But Eve beneath the tree
Listened gravely to me.

“Soul,” I said, “gentle land
Of all forbidden bliss,
Feel the sinuous love
I’ve robbed the Father of?
Essence of heaven I have
For honey-sweet designs
Delicately aligned.
Take this fruit—stretch your arm.
He made that pretty hand
To pluck the things you wish.”

An eyelid struck the silence—
But breath swelled the dark breast
That the Tree’s shade possessed.
The other shone like a pistil.
—*Hiss, hiss!* it sang to me,
And I felt energy
Run through my whip. The thrill
In every cumbering coil
Vibrated from the beryl
Of my crest out toward peril!

Genius!—Impatient wait!
At last the time is come
When steps to Enlightenment
Spring from those naked feet.
Marble aspires, and gold
Is poised; the pedestals
Of shade and amber tremble . . .
To spill consent, the urn

Slowly begins to stumble,
Who seemed so taciturn.

Delighting in temptation,
Yield to the lures you see.
Let thirst for transformation
Ring the Forbidden Tree
Round with a chain of poses.
Come without coming! Step
Vaguely, heavy with roses.
Dear body, dance and forget!
Here pleasure's sole decree
Justifies what will be.

O foolish to indulge
This sterile dalliance:
To see the long back quake
In disobedience . . .
On yielding up its essence
Of wisdom and illusions,
The mighty Tree of Knowledge,
Disheveled in its visions,
Shook its great trunk that streams
Sunward, and sucks on dreams.

Great Tree, all Heaven's shade,
Compelling Tree of trees,
Who search the marble's flaw
For nectars rare as these,
You in whose labyrinths
The intertwining shades
Hurry to lose themselves
In endless sapphire days,
Sweet ruin, breath of love,
Or predestined dove,

O singer, hidden drinker
Among the deepest gems,
Cradling the reptile dreamer
Who sang Eve into dreams,

Great Being, whom visions stir,
Who yet, to see still more,
Grow, straining at the tip,
You whose hard limbs unfold
In leaves of purest gold,
Whose webbed roots delve the pit,

Press back the infinite
Marked by your rising crest,
And know yourself to be
All knowledge, grave to nest!
But this old amateur
Of chess, in the torpor
Of dry sun, starts to writhe
Along your branch; his glare
Shakes loose the fruits of death,
Disorder, and despair.

Good serpent, rocked in blue,
I hiss, but gently now,
Offering to God's grandeur
The triumph of my sadness.
I am repaid by seeing
Huge hopes of bitter fruit
Madden the heirs of flesh.
Their thirst exalts toward Being
The strange and absolute
Power of Nothingness.

DOROTHY ROBERTS

A Marvel

One of the images in my brain
is a galaxy seen through a telescope years ago
at a distance from where my life is now,
small light-blur becoming only in thought one of the great views,

One of the views that can be looked at from another time
so distance lays out a plan full of light full of expansion—
expanded back into itself and condensed
into one of the great grounds of sense.

Only in thought is it realized
as more than a white breath an enterprise in itself
where further laws are likely to be the same laws
to hold poised the great exuberance,

And on and on to convert its size
into an intensity as immense an action as intense
and governable by ways as ours—
or how does it follow the heavens and yet can be recalled
to the telescope again ever at this hour?

By time—years ago it was first seen—
it has settled itself into the laws of dream,
for the laws are the same
for inventing the telescope's eye as being in the brain,
they light and relight in inexhaustible profusion the sources of
energy,
a note of profoundest proportion earns them the name.

More and more goes on and surrounds
the eclipsed self as the galaxy proves
in one of the great views given of light
on the vast horizon of being
at the outskirts of all we don't have do have and marvel at.

GUY DAVENPORT

C. Musonius Rufus

IACTURA VIGORIS non fortuita est: agitur semper unum antitetrahedron. This dust of poppy, fitchet, bone is in an exact precession with which the gods are intimate but not our rough minds. Who, seeing a mother on her knees before the mammillaria of Cybebe, the Arvals flouring a calf for the knife, the standards of Quirinus in white mist around the watchfires, could believe that the gods are as indifferent as gravity? I huddle upon the wild rose, wait with the moth upon the wall, still as time.

All at first was the fremitus of things, the jigget of gnats, drum of the blood, fidget of leaves, shiver of light, boom of the wind. The tremor of my cry may have had something to do with choosing this threshold. There are other sills, empty places with intolerable glare, presences, noon quiet, of lonely desperate desert waste abandonment the essence. I have died again in them. Those who go to the inhuman to place their hopes upon its alien rhythms, its bitter familiarity with nothing, its constant retreat from all that only we can love, are hostages to vastation.

The majesty of the eagles in their gold, the arms raised in salute, the cries of obeisance, praise, and glory, the rise of the horns falling in fioritura: we never ask why the gods do not march in poms, under arch after arch after arch.

I AM THE EMPERIOR Balbinus kept in a jug. Together with Illyrian dust. Some flower petals a congenital mourner threw on the body are also in here along with a dead bee that was by occupation connected with the flowers.

The ghosts of bees I am told by the Consiliarii form a congregation in Cyprus though many are in Elysion itself and others where they sang and foraged in their little lives. Hymettos and Chios and such bright places.

Having been an emperor I am divine. Not the kin of the gods as I had supposed but a god patent and absolute.

Nature is here too. In the first weeks when I was still drunk with death I fretted to be out. An instinct as it were to flow was my initial response to the new state of things. They had come to me,

crowding against the outside of the urn, the Consilarii as they called themselves, and hailed me as a divinity, just as the general, the few senators, and functionaries recently hailed me Imperator, anxiously, with not more than two *aves* apiece, immediately urging me make haste and flee. A rival faction in Hispania or the Provincia Gallicum had also wrapped an emperor in the purple.

Trumpets, a roll of the drums, a hasty salute, and I was off. We rode toward a forest.

The horror of the knives was soon over, and they talked of other things while they were doing it. I remember squealing like a pig.

Light through matter makes it spin. Knowledge is to the mind what water is to grime and sweat. I was turning in my jug and I wanted to know why. No sooner had I wondered than I knew. A Consiliarius put his face to mine, eye to eye. He turned as I turned. A kind of red music ran in and out of my ears, what used to be my ears.

Was I to spin forever, a *turbo* from which God himself had whipped the cord? To ponder is to pose, and my answer was that to turn is to exist. The very pollen which a bee has kicked from the nectary of a poppy goes into orbit before it sifts down to turn with the earth itself. A cow munching clover is pitching forward with the large roll of the earth.

As the giddiness became usual, I longed to flock to what I loved. My goats, for instance. My figtree. My favorite window looking out over the olives. Especially my goats. I saw their oblong eyes and ellipsoid udders and cornered anatomies.

Was memory to bodger or enrich eternity? I remembered barracks, parades, charges, hospitals, speeches, but as a mouse overhears the talk of a room from the rafters, with perfect unconcern.

What is there to shiver so when a flight of sparrows flutters through my middle? I am not flesh. Unbroken habit of flinching where the body used to be will no doubt fade in time. If I am in time. I think I have become a globe, like all things that spin. Light is round. The Consilarii have taught me that. It goes in all directions at once and thus balloons out from its source. Spirit must be a substance very like light. Old polarity of head and butt no longer maintains. I find that it is sweet to flow through water. Is this thirst?

I say flow and flit and other words of motion without knowing what I mean. For I do not leave my jug. Here in this dark I can still see the pitted terra cotta interior. The dead bee. Withered flowers.

The bee is on its back with its little legs bent at the knees. But I also see an army crossing a ford, a vineyard, and barbarians on mares. Their slant eyes glint like blue steel. Their hair is combed down over their faces and tucked into their belts in front. Gold clasps hold the hair away from their faces. The hair of the head is combed into the hair of the beard. They stink of tallow and horse.

I see flax and roses as if the jelly of the eye were amber honey from Illyria. Whatever I have for an eye it is never closed. Lids are flesh. The eye was spirit all along. Imagine that if you can, whoever beyond the Consiliarii can feel my thoughts. And I can smell. That was spirit too. O, and I can feel. Not surfaces. It takes two for an encounter and I am nothing. But I can pass through. In a tree I feel the thousand threads of water that rise from the roots to the leaves.

I move constrained by the shape of my jar in a kind of crouch, my elbows on my knees, my knees on a line with my ears. Weightless, I still adhere to the ground. At first I waddled through the leaves of trees but found such progress absurd. I went up toward the clouds. O Hercules, what loneliness, what devastation, what fear! I like the open road, especially stationing myself on a bridge. I try to talk to donkeys, not knowing what to say.

Nor is it congenial to go downward into the earth. I first ventured a well. Then I went down to where iron grows. Down past seines of roots in loam like condered oak-gall and down past yellow marl hard with quartz the splintered ores begin. Green, edged, with the black metal smell horses hate and wine sours next to, and which thunder has entered. Chill, sacred iron, bitter with lightning. Stay away. It is not human. It is from the beyond, from up, the stuff of the moon and cold stars. It is down, the pit is iron. It neither breathes nor moves. The gods own it but it is not a god. Pity is not in it.

I have thrust myself into a sunflower and washed in its basil green. Near deep iron I have shuddered and gone numb.

Like a snake I take my warmth from the world. I make none of my own. This godstuff I'm of is not by Hercules flesh. It is a kind of air, but more organized and articulate. There is the ghost of a bunion on the ball of my left foot, the soldier's corn, where we pivot. Though I feel, there is no seriousness to it, as in a dream. The ride of a wasp through my eyes, rain through my arms, wheat awns combing my bowels, all I meet in my flow swims through me as easily as a fish.

But things do not always get to me or I to them. I stream across

geese to a wall and find myself in a country I have never seen, the brick hives of Chaldea mayhap, Indus fowls bright as flowers in the streets.

I nod in a cowstall, liking the straw and dried pease. I wake by a river, near a skiff, an old Tiber herm brown with time, baskets. I exist without continuity. While squatting in a wine vat I am suddenly on board the *Hecate* sailing for Marsala. And in my urn all the while.

WE ARE DIGGING a canal across Greece, through rock, the depth of a mountain's height.

If you have never swung a pickaxe, brother, never been chained ankle to ankle, you know no more than a child what's ahead of you.

The canal is to connect the bay of Corinth and the Saronicus and be a path from the Adriatic to the Ionian. God knows when they began it, some centuries ago judging by my first look, and Rome will be as old as the world itself when it is finished, if it is finished.

Greece! I would have taken this place to be Africa. Corinth is somewhere over there, they say, a separate city from the Acrocorinth, on a hill, sacred to the slut Aphrodite.

Flies, shit, sweat rancid as a whiff of billy goat, fatigue as deep in the bone as water in the sea.

There is a kind of exhilaration in having lost all, once the anguish subsides. Once the anguish subsides.

We are chained ankle to ankle, and to each other. My fellow to the left is a Scythian who lives off fury. He eats his beans like a wolf, he scoops clay when he can get at it and eats that too. He prays to strange gods.

My fellow to the right is Roman enough, but dead. I tell him that they have our bodies only, not our souls, but he stares at me as if I were a lunatic.

To want nothing, I tell him, is freedom, to will nothing is death. He wills nothing. He wants his freedom, still, and his soul is sick with that lust. It is a terrible want that adds to the weight of the pick, thickens fatigue, mixes rage with mere despair.

We sleep in our filth, unconscious as soon as they order us to lie down. And we rise while we are still asleep, and drink swill, and go off under the lashes to the rockface. It takes them awhile to unchain the dead, and it is harder on us, in both spirit and body, to drag a corpse in the chains. Yesterday we dragged poor Mnescus half the

morning before the crew with the files and snippers could get around to us.

The third or fourth swing of the pick and he died standing, his tongue out like a mouthful of sponge, his eyes rolled back white, his old knees trembling like a wet dog.

After you've had your fill of horrors, they cease to burn. There is to be nothing else, after all. It rains, we work in mud. We are grateful for the difference. The beans are sometimes black rather than red. New prisoners arrive, and we are avid to learn why they are here.

The horns, the long horns blare, and we are off in our chains, morning after morning. Yeorgi, three down to the left, will probably die before the day is out. I've looked my look at the son of a bitch of a guard when they had us out at the crack of dawn, meaning that if he had the featherweight of a man in him, he would take Yeorgi out of the gang, spitting blood as he was, fever in his eyes.

The guidons were up, no man might speak. The horns, the old sergeants who had frozen their balls on the Rhine and roasted them in the Oxus held their dignity under the standards, the drums, and the shouting in our faces, barbary apes that we were to them, the shit in the latrines being shovelled over, another day, another day.

They even have an *emperor* here, as if we were the army on a campaign, or a deputation in Hispania. It is the old fart himself, a marble bust thereof, around which they put the purple nightshirt, and a breastplate and greaves. They march him behind the SPQR, goose-stepping and pounding on the drums, jingling the sistrum, and roaring *AVE!*

O to kiss a pig's butt and it ripe with diarrhea!

Once when I was in Old Granny's Pisspot, that windowless judgment down by the Maxima, black as Egypt on a Thursday night, a wealth of rats travelling in all directions, juggled all over again because the monster's spies had found another nest of philosophers and stirred us up with their sticks and frogmarched us before a hogjowled magistrate who sentenced us from behind his nosegay, looking at us sideways, to three months' darkness, or longer, subject to the emperor's *pleasure*, once when I was going fishbelly white and blind as a mole because the emperor emits little yipes of horror when he hears of a philosopher in Rome, a letter came to me from God knows where or how, it was tossed in with the mildewed bilge they fed us.

A letter! It was from Apollonius.

Esteemed Musonius, it said, it was written in Greek. Esteemed Musonius, than whom no one is more able in philosophy, my heart is sore pressed to learn that you are detained by the government. And so on and so forth, and he would come to see me.

The next handing around of the slop I asked the guard if his imperial majesty's postal service, famed for its delivery of eclogues from the Caucasus to Celtiberia and of sycophantic procurators' lies from the Pillars of Hercules to the spice groves of Arabia Felix extended to this colicky whore's ass of a jail?

—He is here, he whispered.

—*He?* Who?

—The wizard.

—Apollonius?

—Him.

—*Me hercle, nai gonades kynoi!*

And then there was a scratching about in the dark, and the slit of grey light up the corridor that one saw when the guards slipped in and out, opened up into a rectangle of glare, and light even got into my cell, strange as snow in the desert.

I could see him in black outline only, legs as spindly as a stork's, nose huge, dressed in some antique robe with fringes, something one's Etruscan maiden aunt would turn up in at the Circus.

—Musonius?

—The wretch himself.

I should not have replied in despair, for it is more painful to the free to see you jailed than it is to be jailed.

—Menippus here.

Menippus? He was, like Damis, one of the master's henchmen. He wanted to make a trial run, he said, before he brought the Philosopher. Meanwhile, he had brought another letter, which I read by the light of the open door up the passage.

Apollonius the learner to Musonius the philosopher, greeting! I would like to come share your lodgings in order that I might share your conversation, it said, so help me Jupiter and Hera. Unless, it went on, you cannot believe that Herakles freed Theseus from the dreary house of Hades. Answer, dear soul, what you would have me do. *Errôso.*

—I shall take your answer down, Menippus hissed at me in the half dark.

I dictated, his stylus flicked at the wax.

I said that he was not to come. I could see Nero having the hysterica passio into a perfumed handkerchief at the report that the most spiritual of philosophers, the stringy haired, barefoot ascetic Apollonius had moved into a jail cell with the red Rufus. I can defend myself, I said. My mind is stronger than ever. I have done no wrong. Find my students and talk with them, until we can converse in the quiet and peace befitting philosophy. I said that to fit in with what I knew to be his style. He knew that like randy old Socrates I could talk philosophy in stables and at the baths, in the fish market and on the road, practically anywhere except at a rich man's table, where the level of conversation is below that of a dove-cote of whores conniving to up their prices.

He would never find the cobbler who was one of my best disciples, old Marcus who had a true flare for the Pythagorean poetry of things and a noble grasp of stoic wisdom. Nor would he stumble upon the Senator who keeps his philosophy to himself, or the slavewoman Dorcas whose dignity of mind I would place beside that of Cicero. More than likely he would ferret out, such is my luck, the scamp Fabricius who follows me for my knuckly rhetoric, as he calls it, and who spends half his time at the gymnasia ogling backsides and pretty eyes and the other half pumping his seed onto the garret ceiling or alley walls or tiles of the public baths. But the boy has a mind and a lovely imagination, and Apollonius probably has the Platonic flare for a snub nose and black curls and a peplon that stops in the middle of the butt. And when Nero throws Fabricius in the jug, he'll take it like a man.

Aie! Apollonius, Apollonius.

He wrote again. He reminded me that Socrates, refusing help from his friends, was executed.

I wrote back that Socrates died because he would not take the trouble to defend himself. I shall defend myself.

Errôso.

He has since learned for himself what the inside of a Roman prison is like. Pythagoreans and Stoics are all one to the imperial police.

Roma, you old baggage and suet sack, you are worthy of your Nero.

A DELEGATION CAME of trembling splendor, Consuls of the dead they said they were. One lifted a hand. Their patrician faces and beautiful feet seemed to me to be godlike, their eyes a fidget of light.

—We are the wardens, they said.

I confused them with the other delegation, the colonels of the Praetoria who came to make me emperor. On both occasions a dread chill struck my bones, my real bones the first time, a memory of bones, the second. Great moments should not have made me feel so small. But the letter of the law is spite. I have had ample opportunity to see that with awful certainty. The law requires an emperor. The great families had no more emperors. The landlords and the equestrians declined absolutely, having better sense. Anybody would do. When great nations go to seed, you will find all sorts of men in the purple, provincial tax collectors, lawyers, bald generals with remote victories in the Rhineland to their credit, grocers, and petty army officials, like me.

To the Consiliarius with silver eyes who sat with a basket of anemones as red as blood at his elbow I said I had been made emperor of Rome a fine morning in Pannonia. By noon we were crossing the Ister, where I was advised to flee toward Singidunum with a contingent of Praetoriani. At sunset they abandoned me.

Surely I was not the first emperor to pee the purple? I remember banked rack over the Carpathians, a band of Gypsies, a brown child riding a goat. I gave the Gypsies the damp toga and six denarii in exchange for an ass on which I made my way into a terrible wood. I soon heard hooves and saw the knives in the half light. Never should man kill anything at all.

If the name Balbinus does not go into your ear like Caligula or Augustus it is because history is a slut. She will accept pomp every time over worth. Did not Augustus say with the last of his breath that instead of a funeral oration he wanted a round of applause?

It is because the historians would find little beyond my name to record that the Consilarii were patient with me. They seemed not to want to obtrude, and kept a polite distance when they appeared. Of one I could make out a blue eye only. The rest was shadow. The second was clearer, the folds of his toga fell through a rose bush, a very pretty pattern.

Another time they came through an ilex with a rabbit in each hand. A sacrifice, I assumed. One that I had perhaps omitted on the outside, the inside, whichever I'm on now. I can't get it straight. Pensum is verbum in this layer of the world, between the tissue of light and its stay on the bought and hollow of things. They are of our realm, I understood them to mean. We may talk with eyes here, I don't know. And the pensum inside the word folds out here. I was

beholden to these staring bucks. Even they come through the membrane, the one said to the other, meaning me.

I began to see the significance of having come across with the bee. It brought me, I think.

I found a Consiliarius in a stand of thistle by a milestone, turning himself leisurely inside out and back again, like candle smoke in a still room.

—Jupiter! I said, remembering that I had not thought to ask after the gods.

He closed his hand and opened it.

—Jupiter, he said.

—Juno?

He joined his hands.

I gave it up. I knew that he would make a fist for Mars and a finger for Venus, would knit his knuckles for Minerva and smooth his hand along the air for Mercurius.

—Themselves! I cried. I am not a schoolboy.

He went into the milestone like water into sand.

ROMA, Roma. Pain makes us all equal here, in Rome it is the differentiator. We have had to learn not to laugh at the bloody stump, the epileptic jerking along, the milky eye, the legless. Such amusements belong to the city, where a lady, her face a glory of powder, Sidonian lips, a tower of hair woven with pearls, earrings like stars, can shake her litter with a fit of laughter at the sight of a humpback swinging along on crutches, where mothers, barristers, doctors gasp with pleasure as two dwarves hack themselves to a butchered ruin in the Circus.

Of the crucifixions, that peculiarly Rome entertainment, a Greek said to me one day in tears, *have you no Goddess of mercy?* None, I said. He had seen a crucifixion against his will, and had been held by the horror of it longer than he could stand, were he sane at the time, as he said, for he lost his mind when he realized that the spectators were *laughing*.

And yet he had not seen, as I have, a thief almost apologetic for having such a terrible time with his pain as the nails were driven into his wrists and feet. He bellowed like a bull, driven wild by the pain, and when they pulled the *crux* up to go into its socket his scream pierced to the quick of your bones, but you could scarcely hear it over the laughter of the audience.

Here we do not laugh at pain, our lot in common. We have only averted eyes or a word of courage to serve for compassion, having learned something of what the Greeks mean by sympathy. Or is it shame?

The Procurator comes down in a litter to the channel, a Garamantian trotting beside him with an umbraculum. A wart tarantulous and inauspicious sprouted from the flange of the old custus's nose and a goiter the size of a piglet wrenched his chin around to his shoulder. He kept shouting that he must not be brought near any lepers.

The SPQR rides high before, carried by a wheezing corporal whose leather cinctures squeak and whose face shines with sweat.

The Procurator wiggles his ringed fingers at a scribe. The Machinator leans to listen. The litter out among the ravaged earth which we are hacking and loading into buckets looks like nothing so much as a beribboned and curtained cradle that has been spirited from a censorial nursery onto the wastes of Calabria.

We see a tall soldier from the guard summoned to the custator's frilly lecticula. The old boy swings out. He needs to piss and it is his whim to piss against the soldier, who stands at attention while he is being pissed upon. There is natural philosophy in us all. I hope he did not take it as an honor, knowing all the while that he did.

I SKIDDLE down into grass fading to hay, grass bearding out into awns, worts, burrs, and docks, down among hoppers and midges sawing the air, tumblebugs, ants, and silvery crawlers. I find a ball of grass, a nest, and there lies a mama mouse with three implausibly small and exact baby mice at her teats, pumping with their paws. Her belly, throat, and whiskers are white, otherwise she is as brown as an acorn except for her eyes which are like wet black apple seeds. She is patient and alert. Her tail lies across her young like the pin of a fibula.

O Lady Mouse, I breathe, your well wisher here who has come to visit, the round of nothing before you in this fine grass, was the emperor of Rome.

Whereupon the Consilarii were suddenly with me, one with a red moth for an eye, a sycamore seed for another, mulberry leaves for hair. Clustered bees were his beard, a lion's bones, still joined, his body, a lizard his sex. His fellow was a leopard through which you could see, like water.

—Mus mater haec, Moth Eye said. Here in this place a temple used to stand. The ground is still sacred.

Whose temple? I watched the mouse no bigger than a thumb and her brood snuggled so neatly between her forelegs and hindlegs, eager little fellows.

—Diktyнна, Leopard answered, the Lady. Cut stone is not to her liking, and she abides these long houses with their thin rock trees out of the courtesy of the undying until old Kelp Beard knocks them down, at which we have heard her laugh, her and her girls, her and her bears.

Am I now her kin? Does my divinity put me into her family?

—O no, Moth Eye was quick to say, too quick, for I am easily confused. The gods, he went on, are powers like wind and snow, mercy and light. You, an emperor, when you find something to care for, will be given the necessary power to care for it. That will be the extent of your godhood. There is a king from the north who rides with wrens and spells them on their eggs, an earl of the Angles who roosts with gannets, a queen of the Belgii who has lived for a hundred years with spotted toads in the great wood that grows between the Rhenus and the Mosa.

THEY mount the crosses where we can see them if we lift our eyes from our pickaxes, carrion crows crowded along the arms.

Distance, distance. I can lie at night in the stink of piss and smegma and regain the window in which I sat at Poplicola's house on the Via Nola, English geese gabbling among the poultry for a pastoral note, the cool house warmed by our yellow Roman light that filled the windows like a kindness, a din of traffic beyond just enough garden walls to make a pleasant patter, like rain, or the womenfolk in the atrium.

I remember my young head turned by the idea of worth, and my book, an Antisthenes or Hekaton, with the life of Cleanthes of Assos in it, Zeno's successor in the Stoa.

A man worthy of carrying on for Zeno! Zeno, who had died at a full old age by simply ceasing to eat. He was in pain toward the end. *Quit nagging*, he cried out to death, *can't you see that I'm coming of my own accord?*

Cleanthes, my book told, was a boxer who had heard of philosophy and came to Athens with but four small coins in his mouth. Zeno accepted him as a pupil. He made his living as a wa-

terdrawer and miller, selling water for gardens by night and crushing meal at kitchen doors.

O the strangeness of Athens three hundred years ago! So hale was Cleanthes that he was brought before the Areopagitas and asked how he made his living, for he seemed to do nothing but walk up and down the Stoa with Zeno and his barefoot flock, talking about time and necessity, evil and the moon. When witnesses testified that he was their water carrier and their meal grinder, the archons voted him an income of ten minas, which, on the advice of Zeno, he refused.

I began to fall in with the stoics then and there, behind the followers of the followers of Cleanthes.

The mockers twitted him for toting buckets of water. This, they brayed, is philosophy? I know the oily slide of their eyes upward, the ringed hand hanging limp from the wrist, the urine and garlic rictus of ape's teeth and the lizard tongues playing with the money in their mouths.

Do I, Cleanthiskos carissimus would reply with the true Zenonian gall, only hustle buckets? You've missed me chopping weeds? Watering lettuce, basil, melons? O, but I *slave* at philosophy, dear citizens!

One day he showed around a handful of coins. See, he said, I could support a second Cleanthes were I two of myself. Life in the streets of Athens was a kind of myth.

That old Etruscan olive elf and her hoot owl must have had occasions when she wondered why the Greeks built her a city. Homely old Minarva! *Igneae rima micans*, with a farmer's rude understanding of that *rima*, thundery old maiden aunt with her bundles of lightning, an owl witch that these Greeks in their paganry have tried to make into a lady.

He was a slow learner, Cleanthes, and never quite understood the physics of Zeno. Yet he studied harder than any of Zeno's students. The wags called him Herakles, meaning that he was all brawn and skimpy on brains.

He became popular in a way that usually worked with the Athenians. He wore nothing under his cloak, and one windy day when he was walking with his adolescent followers to some rite on the Acropolis a gust opened his clothes. The streets were full of people who applauded his handsome body and talked about it for days. Thereafter he was treated with deference and respect.

Still, he was the butt of Zeno's collegium, the ass who chose the

hardest work, a man proud of his poverty. He said that he would rather dig rock than have to amuse himself. Meaning the rich. Accused of being afraid to botch a task, he replied that this was why he always did things right.

Sositheos included a joke about Cleanthes in a mimiambus at the theatre, and Cleanthes did not so much as bat an eye at the insult. The audience of course looked at him as much as at the actor Sositheos. No rage, no blush. Seeing nothing but nobility, they rose in their seats and clapped for Cleanthes. Then they threw cucumbers and sandals at Sositheos until he fled the stage.

I ROLL into a hawthorn all white and green, around which I fit like a bubble. A sparrow and my knee occupy the same fragrant space wreathed with blossoms, a bee and my right eye. The ground beneath is so intimate, so congenial, that I consider staying here for the life of the bush, to feel rain, wind, snow. Part of me go off to be honey, part wither and fall. In my shoulder the sparrow would weave her nest, feed her young, straddle them with stretched wings atremble in rain, cry other birds away.

The Consilarii came to me through a light busy with points of fire.

—Accident, they said, is design.

I turned in my jug like the slow spin of milk in a churn.

—Here, they said, the bobbin is unwound, the engines of futility dismantled and laid out, so that one could see what rain on a Tuesday had to do with the nightmare of a Spanish cook, how a lie told in the reign of Antoninus caused a Scot to lead a life of total illusion.

WE SPREAD out in a line, defined by our chains, and dig. The line behind us gathers the rubble of our digging into baskets. Between the lines the sergeants move with their whips. The senate drones on, the armies at the borders of the empire stick the Celts and Huns like so many wild boars, and in the Circus hungry lions claw the bowels out of screaming Iudaei while the Emperor God picks his nose.

Once you have muscles in the shoulders and arms, the pick work is not so murderous. And good thick calluses.

Brother, I say to the Sicilian they have chained to my right leg, what brings you to the *inferi* before your time?

Quidnam, ha! Quoquo, ha!

Tears welled up in his eyes.

—*Uxorem necatu' misellam.* He sank the pickaxe so deep into the rock that he had to fight it out again.

—*Puggiunculo!*

Vae! All the crimes of these wretches look like mine, and all their faces are mirrors. I almost said to him that I too had killed my wife, though I have yet to learn whether I have or not. It little matters whether we cut the fool as a hissing miser, farting tyrant, slave, usurer, madman, whore, or pigherd. By playing the philosopher I have given a good woman more grief than any simple soul ought to face.

I taught her to read and write, true, and showed her how the philosophical mind has other pleasures and pains than the blind herd and the dreaming rich. I freed her from superstition until she could hear the raven caw and laugh at it as of no matter. We even kept a pet owl to show that we were immune from the paralysis of ignorant fear. She made herself pet it, though it looked as malevolent as a baby gorgon, and in the night she cried out *Surely we shall all die!*

But I must live with the look on her face the first time they took me away.

The first arrest and sentence, from which I came back. *I came back.* That is the reason I can endure this shit. Not the hope that some sane man will slit the rotten old Catmit's wezand from ear to ear, or that an honest praetor will lower his hemorrhoids onto a bench free of the fingersnap of a politician, or that Iustitia will flounce down from the clouds swinging her ensis and libra, but the fact that I have been to the bottom and walked up again keeps me swinging my pick.

We go down into the earth as we dig, and the sky becomes a bay of blue above us. I read the symbol, I take the measure of the calamity.

IN SPILLWAYS of light through leaves I see boys playing with staves. A black bird with Scythian beak blocks my view. But I see that I can see through that fowl, see sunlight in its bones, the sky through its feathers, see boys through boys, trees through a wall, and on and on until what I see is a trash of color, beautiful rubble.

There are days when I see only white everywhere.

Days when I can hear nothing, see nothing, feel nothing. I am loneliest then, and fearful. I have learned to search the white for a yellow dot, which grows if I stare at it, until a gnat-swarm of bilious specks gathers around it and becomes a detail: a horse's eye, a jug of olive oil, a whetstone.

Once the yellow spot became a fire, thorns cracking under a pot, which emerged from the white after a long wait. I looked, for patience is sometimes all I have, until there were barbarians sitting around the pot. Their eyes were handsome, strange, intelligent. Their women suckled infants at fine brown breasts. Yellow dogs sat on their haunches and grinned.

There was a moon, later, and even later, an owl, their god.

I was going to float among them when the Consiliarii came to me, quickly, like lighting birds in an opposing wind, and said, *No*, that I could not consort with the barbarians.

They said their name, a word with too many syllables and with the accent impossibly on the penultimate. He was a commander of weather and water, their god. His brother is a snake. He is pleased by drums. By bells, gongs, chants.

Firelight on the grease of their cheeks kept me ahover just beyond their grey horses, and the beautiful *chink chink* of their kanoon by which the womenfolk sang lullabies to their young.

Their time is not yours, the Consiliarii said as they shooed me back.

—Give me then, I said, my bee! My sponsor across the Styx. My evangelical bee.

They smiled, the tall Consiliarii. Where we were rose with a jolt, tilted, and shot forward. A music as of birds and laughing children went with us, though measured like a Lydian dance.

And on that silver line between the brown earth and the blue deep of the sky, in a field of clover red and green the whole horizon across, we came to my bee.

—O golden thighed mite! I cried.

—Wax hexagon! said the bee. Right deflection under azimuth, earthspin downward polaroid greens in quanta red shift, dip and shake, forward zoom.

—Brother! I said.

—A shake and a shake, it sang. Angle, angle! Citron ginger sugar green.

—Brother!

—Buzz off, Onion Bulb, it said. Go jump in your jug.

THE first time they got in their rabbit brains that we were magicians I was sentenced to an island. We worked the oars going out, we arrived so glad to be rid of the sea and the whip that we scarcely asked what our punishment was to be. Labor, we assumed, a bitter existence we assumed, the life of a slave.

But there was no garrison there, no master of the whip. Nothing. Rock, bushes, weeds, and the winking glare of the sea all around.

And no water. We looked, the miserable lot of us. *There was no water on the island.*

We were murderous pimps, men who had lost all to the *exactors'* moneylenders, one-handed thieves, highwaymen, merchants of children, *magi*, philosophers.

Here in the Great Corinthian Ditch we at least know we shall have our swill, and even when. It's a kind of frog spawn with iron beans. But it is always there.

Discipline is our Orcus and our salvation. Rome itself is a shapeless bundle of shitten pissburnt sweatscalded bubonic rotten rags held together with a bronze wire of discipline. Our Centurio gets drunk every sixth day, you can tell by the silly smile and the cingulus on backwards. Every Ides the Dux puts on his yellow frock and goes off with the sergeants and corporals to their Mithraeum they have here in the wilderness. They call each other Brother Lion and Brother Crow.

Even I am here by law. I am a wizard.

The catchpoll described me to the Magistrate when I was hauled in on the charge that landed me here as a subverter of the laws of the State and a blasphemer against the Gods.

—Crap, I said.

—What? said the Magistrate.

—Crap, your Honor. *Merda.*

The Accusator read from the charge: Teaches that women are the equal of men and that their status as infants in the adoption of their husbands is pernicious and against nature. Advocates that women should be educated. Teaches that the gladiators are inhuman and that the spectators at the Circus are bestial and coarse of mind, including his Divinity the Emperor. That taxes are collected by usurers, who keep half, that Roman history is largely fiction, that few barbarian peoples have ever exhibited such moral degradation as the Roman mob, that the Roman gentry are more firmly enslaved to their vices than their slaves to their bondage. . . .

He read on, and on, flicking his tongue across his teeth at the items he considered scandalous and raising his eyebrows at the parts clearly definable as sedition.

—To whom, the Magistrate thought to ask, were these *ridicularia* being taught?

A shuffle of tablets, and a list held up, as if by this token damnation was sealed.

—Clavis, a cobbler, Passer, a catamite, Hispana, a bawd, Tacita, an old woman who keeps a goat, Virga, another catamite, Modestus, a slave, Minicius, a poet . . .

—Scum.

Vero.

—Why do you do this? the Magistrate said to me, with no uncertainty that my perversity was not as clear to me as it was to him.

—To teach men what is in their power to control and what isn't, so that they may cultivate their character and make a garden of their soul.

My failure is to address men as if they were classrooms.

The Magistrate rearranged his chins, milked the lobe of an ear, and asked how many offences I had committed against the Roman Senate and People.

—Five times jailed and once exiled, the Recorder recited. All for sedition. Repeatedly reprimanded for conducting sessiuncula philosophica, so called, to no purpose, as the accused is pig-headed.

So they sent me to Corinth to dig a canal through solid rock from this bay of the ocean to that bay of the ocean.

In my time the world was mad.

CONSIDER Glaukos, the Consilarii said together, who fell into a jar of honey as he chased a mouse, and drowned. I saw the consonance of image with image, his jar and mine, the honey in his, the bee in mine. But I was bald and fat, briefest of emperors. Glaukos, they smiled, was a little boy, his hair coppery and finished, neat across his forehead and snug around his ears. His limbs were so kin in color to the honey in which he fell that the first astonished eyes thought that only his shirt was what they saw.

At first they did not know where he was. Minos sent for men of second sight, and for the godly Kyretes, the circle dancers who could claim the ear of Zeus. They came, they danced, they beat their swords on their shields.

There is a cow among your herds, they said, that changes color twice a day, every fourth hour. The morning finds it white, noon red, evening black. Who knows that cow can bring your son to life when he is found.

That cow, the seer Polyidos said to Minos, is like a mulberry, which is first white, then red, then black.

So hasten, said Minos, who knew by the look in his eye that Polyidos could find his son.

And find Glaukos he did. He knew the jar as soon as he saw it. And none too soon, for a snake had found it just before and was coiled around the jar, sliding upward, as if it were an arm of the octopus painted there in blue.

Polyidos killed the snake with a stone. It came loose from the jar like a knot untied and lay limp in the dust. But before Polyidos could draw near, a second snake rode forward. It smelled its fellow with its tongue, slid away as quickly as a fish through water, and came back with the leaf of an herb in its mouth before Polyidos could take two steps toward the jar. It stuffed the leaf in the dead snake's mouth, and waited. Before long, the dead snake raised its head, shivered down its length, and drew itself together to move.

And with that same herb, said one Consiliarius, Polyidos revived the drowned Glaukos and returned him to his father.

You are like the child Glaukos, said the other, drowned in the honey of time. We think a snake will come to be your dream. Our sources are confused. We are only messengers.

RISE up, dead man, help me drive my row! Grieve, Rufus, I nagged myself with my philosophy, for the poverty of the rich, the impotence of the powerful. The discontinuous ownership of what cannot be kept has smashed us all to shards, the love of what cannot be loved has changed our minds until the business of mind is a ewe in the thicket. Man will die weary of what he was never intended to do.

The ecliptic had left the Ram, where every dawn from Theseus to Tiberius the sun rose red, bringing rain and heron on the one equinox, silencing cricket and scythe on the other, the time of the bloody Persephone and the sleep of snakes, but the world itself was mad.

The Fish were as they have been through eternity, swimming in

their forked river and with their field of starry wheat between them, but the world was mad.

Men with ulcers for eyes carry baskets of rock up the face of the excavation. They are chained, they will not go astray. Hernias bound up with rags brown with urine, piles, teeth rotting with the ache of death itself, boils, welts splitting green, jaundice, fever, hair alive with lice: they ought to bring the Roman crowd here to see us.

They could build a grandstand and bring the spectators here in excursion boats. The slaves at the oars would serve for the prelude. No doubt they would find it boring. They have become bored with the chariot races, and they have long since ceased to see horses, at whose deaths they begin to flutter their fans and gossip.

Your Roman has in fact never quite seen anything but the surface, the outside of anything. He would die of shame to be a slave because he would be *seen* as a slave. You might know that Roman sovereignty would be inherent in a color. And no Roman would be seen watching the butcher work in the Circus except in the whitest of togas.

God bless the flies! Their maggots are our only doctors.

The spectators would much rather have seen us on the island, the waterless island.

—*Nonnunquam pluit, nonne?*

—Never. It has not rained in these islands since the dawn of the world.

Were it to rain, we considered, we could let it drench our clothes and wring them over our mouths. Was there dew? Could we dig a well? And with what?

Thirst is a deprivation that drives you mad before it kills you. I knew that much.

There is a man here in the gangs at Corinth whom madness has touched to the marrow. We go stupid as we are worked to death, drained of the last of our mother wit, humanity out, dullness in. Madness, though, is a kind of conflagration of the intellect, a man locked in a room beating on all the doors and walls just in case something might give. It is childish, madness, the irrational frenzy of wanting. Yet to a dullard who has long since absorbed his childhood with greed, the bondage of easily gratified desires, the return of a smidgin of innocence shocks him into madness. A man rots when the child in him dies.

The *genius* philosophers urge us to heed is but a grasp of one's childhood, any moment of which unrelinquished to the demons of time is sufficient to keep the god Apollo near enough, near enough. One touch of virginity can sweeten the sourest vinegar of a ravaged soul, one touch of liberty still green, one unforgotten chill at looking at a moth on the back of the hand. Savage folly in a turm of white butterflies, a quitch shot with crickets, hide and seek in the barley awns!

THISTLE, goldfinch, star. A star in its eye, the goldfinch pecks a blue thistle with pert bill. Cricket chitter charms the air. Anna Perenna! sings the finch. Anna Perenna!

I am, or think I am. I know I was. I and the bee, we were. I and the bee and the flower. And now we all three are, somewhere. Of the jug I do not know the tenses. It was once on a potter's wheel and in a kiln, and before that it was clay, perhaps in a river. Some craftsman, the potter I suppose, has painted a horse on it, a kind of duck or goose, and some zigzags and stars. Has anything of mine survived? I signed my name over and over. I was never politician enough to kill my enemies, they are great sources of fame. My name must be in a list somewhere. Some schoolmaster will say my name to little boys on their benches.

I escaped a lot of the meanness of the world. I was not a slave or a tax collector.

My wife and her moustache all the depilatories however astringent could not remove rarely haunt my reveries, though I wonder sometimes with a memory as of the knives if she will ever join me here in the swirls of pollen between the two plies of the cloth of light that adheres to all the surfaces of the world. That is where I may be. It was always the outside of light I saw alive. I am most certainly now on the other side. The back of orange is brown. The back of yellow blue. But I may be between the outer and the inner film.

Sometimes when the campagna is hazy with wagon dust and twilight, rain clouds blackening in the north, I see lizards the size of elephants clumping through ferns as big as oaks. They go on their hind legs in a hopping glide, holding their forepaws out like women crossing the street. Their eyes are little and stupid, their tails as long as a ship. They gobble and honk.

I go into a nettle when I see them, peering out through the fuzz. I

have mentioned them to the Consiliarii, who say they cannot see them, and praise me for my gifts, and question me as to what I mean by the word *size*. I have given up trying to explain. A dog is smaller than a horse, I tell them by way of illustration. They smile and look at each other in wonder.

OUR madman has made himself a ragdoll from scraps of cloth, sticks, and bits of twine. He hangs it around his neck while we swing the picks, and cuddles it at night. His eyes are as lost as the exiles' eyes on the island where there was no water, eyes that were fearful of a bush, of the sun, of footsteps from behind.

What to a child is a tor blue in its own shadow as the light goes level but the humped house of the old steganopodous lar himself whose grin all grizzle and whose pounce *illotis manibus* are why there are hearths in the world at all?

Habitarunt di quoque silvas collesque. What elves are the gods that we should forget to shiver when they crack a stick in the frost outside the house? Children are not the wolves that men become, if they had a grandmother worthy of the name.

I've admired the ragdoll of our madman, who watched me for five *puncti* together, looking for the spite. He hid the doll in his tatters, but next day he motioned me over with an idiot smile. He was nursing the doll at his bosom.

—We must be so careful, I said.

—*Sice sicuti!* he sputtered, crouching to look sharply over his shoulder.

I look into his eyes and know that madness is not the way I shall go. I am damned to sanity and to hope. I have seen her again whom I'd never hoped to see. I have seen wildflowers in the wall after they put us on the waterless island to die as best we could. Fortuna moves with fire in her left hand, water in her right. Discovery is always more than what you meant to find. You look for a woman to bake your bread and be delicious in your bed and you find patience and kindness. You look for truth and find strength. I looked for water and found C. Musonius Rufus. I lost him, I think, in the galleys coming out, perhaps in the windowless jail before. Perhaps I had never found him at all. The imitation of a man who found Rufus spoke with the tongue of the shills and panders around him, saw as they saw, lost hope as they lost hope, threw hope away with the abandon of the self hater. Fortuna was a whore, what doubt

could there be of it? Cleanthes and Zeno! Had they ever been closed in the bilge of a Roman galley, had they been abandoned on a rock in the Aegean? They had never seen human beings indistinguishable from the gutter rats of Rome.

We talked murder, to drink the blood. We armed ourselves with sticks and rocks, making territories. I found an overhang of rock that I could be under part of the day. The tide of our sea is very shallow, but it was enough to fill my shelter.

In the part furthest back of this little inlet the sand was whiter, finer. I thought how if I were a child I would delight in that clean place under the rock, in the translucent green shelf of cool water over the sand. Jagged stone in hand, I kept one eye on the rise above me, one on the hollow. How long had I seen a burble in the surface of the thin water where it slipped as shallow as papyrus over the sand?

IL RICORDO DELLE ANTICHE PROVE FREME NEI CUORI, COSÌ COME L'IMPETO VERSO IL FUTURO!

La Banda Municipale Filarmonica di Rapallo stood at parade rest in front of the flag of the Motherland, the standard of Genoa, and the *bandiera fascista*. An honor guard in black shirts, jackboots, and alpine hats stood behind the flags, carbines on the ready. The bandmaster mopped sweat from under his chin. For the fortieth time someone had hushed their chatter and horseplay to say that they heard the automobiles.

—*Adesso!*

—*Finalmente!*

NON BISOGNA CREDERE E FAR CREDERE ALLA FACILITÀ DELLA GUERRA: SAREBBE UN ALIMENTARE DELLE ILLUSIONI ASSURDA. LA GUERRA SARA ASPRA E DURA.

The moment, if ever it would begin, was sacred and potent with glory. The Duce di Fascismo, himself, would arrive with certain members of the Party. He was to be greeted with *Giovanezza, Giovanezza!* They would salute in the salute of the Caesars, he would salute. The bandmaster would shout the order to about face, so that the banners and the guard were facing toward Rapallo, which lay by the sea two long downward curves of a road lined with

people who would throw flowers and cry *Duce du-ce du-ce! Viva l'Italia fascista!*

They would double-time, smartly, swiftly, elegantly, never blurring a note. The flags would stream in the wind. They would enter the town with tilted horns, tilted chins, under the banners strung from building to building.

MA È TEMPO DI CESSARE OGNI SCHERMAGLIA POLEMICA. GLI EVENTI INCALZANO. L'UNIONE DEGLI ITALIANI È ORMAI UN FATTO COMPIUTO. NESSUNO DEVE TURBARLA. NESSUNO LA TURBERÀ. È IL SEGNACOLO DELLA VITTORIA.

Two motorcycle couriers arrived first, minutes before the *Duce*. They braked, expressionless in their goggles, gave a gauntleted salute of the Caesars, shouted that the Duce di Fascismo was immediately behind them, and rode forward around the band, one to the right, one to the left.

The automobiles were suddenly there, while everybody was still watching the motorcyclists. The Duce was in his Alfa Romeo between two Mercedes. He was the first one out, doubletiming as soon as he was on the road. The bandmaster gave three salutes.

The Duce jogged in place, pulling down his tunic and setting his Sam Brown belt right. A gold sash looped his torso and hung from its hip knot down his left thigh. Il Aiutante danced beside him, his moustaches flapping, his chin high like the Duce's.

—*Avanti!* shouted the Duce.

—*Avanti a passo di corsa!* ordered the Aiutante.

—*Dietro front!* bellowed the bandmaster.

And down the road they went, *Giovanezza, Giovanezza!* thumping out in a wonder of shrill brass and resonant drum, the ancient gonfalon of Genoa jouncing beside the tricolor and the Fascist flag with its Italic ax bound in a bundle of sticks. A yellow dog and a brown joined them on the first curve, outpacing the guard and the color bearers.

The sad eyes of Max Beerbohm watched them as they bounced past his garden wall.

SONO OGGI FIERI E FEDELI GLI ITALIANI ALL' ESTERO!

The Mayor of Rapallo standing in a school of priests gave the

salute of the Caesars as the band and the Duce trotted into the square in front of the City Hall. Children with bouquets of roses sang The Fascist Hymn. The Duce stood with his legs apart, his thumbs hooked in his belt, his chin high.

—*Camicie Nere!* he said. *Popolo di Rapallo!*

And made a speech. *Non vi è dubbio che giammai, come in questi ultimi tempi, l'Italia ebbe uno spirito militare così elevato.* And so forth.

Afterwards, the sun low over the bay of Tigullio, he visited the American poet Ezra Pound and admired his bust by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska.

—Why do you write poetry? he asked.

—To put my ideas in order, Ezra Pound said.

—Will you read us one of your poems?

Ezra Pound read two pages from his *Cantos*.

—*Ma quest'*, said Mussolini, *è divertente!*

AFTER nightfall, on my knees in the water, I dug. I scooped the sand out by handfuls. The deeper I went, the wetter the sand. This, *hercle*, was Rufus work.

The world is out there, independent of your will. I am here, behind the red furze of my beard, in my eyes, in my crazy knees and spine all but sprung. Demetrius the silversmith liked to say that he was a better silversmith than Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus was an emperor. Old Nihil Magnus. I am a better slave than he is an emperor. You suck such consolation at your peril.

Give me, *frater*, fatter *consilia*. I remember the tombstone seen by some traveller in Asia Minor which a barbarian woman had set up, saying that she was the mother of two strapping sons, and that she had attended the grammar school in her old age to learn to read and write.

I remember the bitch the urchins found trapped in a wareroom, her ribs a corrugation down her pitiful body. She had eaten one of her puppies all except the head. She had eaten her shit. They brought me the bitch and pups, knowing me to be a fool, and when I gave her a bowl of mush she would not eat until her puppies had eaten. And when she ate she kept an eye on her brood. I renewed my devotions to Artemis. Rome has declined in virtue since Remus and Romulus pulled at the wolf's dugs. Would they had got her solicitude along with the milk.

I remember while licking my pan clean of its swill dinners at which the vomitoria went around twice. You drink melted snow after you spew, chew a bit of ginger, and then go at the partridge breasts roasted in wine and garlic.

I remember tubs of leavings going off to the swine for which we would give thanks enough to run a sweet tickle into the ears of the gods. Once they brought a fat man here who wept like a woman while the smith soldered the shackles on his trotters. We watched the lard melt away day by day. He buckled fairly soon, pitching forward with his eyes rolled white and his tongue somewhere down his throat. His fellows beside him on the chain robbed him of his rags while he was still pitching in his agony. *Liber ille est*, someone said.

Voices, voices. I who had loved rhetoric like a mistress rarely hear two words together more articulate than the hinny of an ass. It was a voice hoarse as a raven over my shoulder when I was digging under my rock that said, *You're clearing a spring!*

Caepoculus, who had a chancre for his left eye. I knew him when he ran a little theatre on the Via Scortilla where he was to be seen in a beaked mask, tail feathers on his butt, castanets on his fingers, dancing in the street to a music played by boy drummers and a fat whore with a tambourine who was so heavy that she had to be carried in a litter by slaves with gilded eyelids.

God, what an *ostentatio*. From that he came to this, no doubt by ways as mazy as Roman streets.

—Help me dig, and keep quiet, I said.

He hopped down beside me, hot as a stove with fever, and plunged his stringy arms into the sand. His one eye had horse terror in it, unblinking and staring. It was a bawdy eye in its day, eloquent of suggestion, when I had seen him cavorting in his feathers like an ostrich with piles, luring customers to his cellar where he presided as master of ceremonies over sottish musicians whose flesh was the color of lead. They played what they called antique Greek music while one of the boys humped a miserable old nanny goat, and the hippopotamine whore, she of the tambourine, danced the shimmy, and Caepoculus did the act for which he had a certain vogue. He lifted his tail feathers and farted in various styles announced beforehand in a solemn voice. A cultivated swain easing a squeak of sewer gas past the attention of a *hera*. A senator inadvertently punctuating his bombast with garlicky trumpeting. A poet's lyric toot while in rapture. A judge's authoritative *peditum*.

A Christian's pious hiss. Emperor Nero's thunderous roll and clap.

I remembered my geology, I remembered wells, the nature of earth, the evidence of the weeds, which were richer over my nook of the island than elsewhere. My hands bled, my nails tore. I had to stop Caepoculus and teach him how. I made a hole so deep my arms were in to the shoulders to get the next scoop of sand, wet sand, wet sand.

We dammed the inlet with what we dug out, adding rocks for strength. The sea could not slosh in.

That is my shield against the Gorgon stare when the drums beat and the awful trumpets blow for the day's work in this monster of a ditch. I slog off to the latrines, to the messline, clanking in step with my brothers along the chain, to the great gully the sides of which are deep enough to make twilight of its bottom. For I am Rufus.

We found water.

I DO not know where I am. I live in the oak Volsca, who is a thousand years old. Trees are people I have learned. There is too dark a difference between me and the animals. I cannot understand what they are doing, so busy all the time.

But trees like me, I think. I can hang from their boughs like a pear, an olive, an apple. They eat light. Volsca tells me tales, old, old tales. He remembers when elks were the kings of the world. He remembers the Etruscans, who watched the lightning with him. He has seen the sun black at noon. He calls me *one who moves in winter*.

I have been with ships on the sea, so far that the horizon is water all the way around, I have flown with the kestrels to their nests, I have been down to the bottom of the sea and watched spiders frail as hairs walking through forests of coral. The Consiliarii have abandoned me. I go by feel. I long to know the animals, to whom I am a stranger, perhaps forever.

In the oak Volsca I can lose myself in leaf after leaf, where light is fermented and all smells of a sharp green, in the mellow brown acorns, in the mistletoe. I can get close to the owls when they are asleep. At night we watch the stars, Volsca and I, the moon and the planets.

DAVE SMITH

One Question, Two Seasons

to Mary Alice Cornwell

CHURCHLAND SUMMER

That cemetery in the place hallowed by
its name, cramped like all cemeteries in the east,
overburied, overburdened ground, groaning with
deadly replicas of unlikely angels,

I have been back there in the stubbed wilting grass
burned brown as locusts on the oak's trunk,
but not often and never in winter
in the pulse of snow-whirl, and maybe
cold is the wrong season to have
to pack in and go for the feeling of what
comes to me all this blustery day, your hand
like the sea enormously cool in my fever. O that,

but not only that, the ur-anguish I have no word for.

Maybe in heat, with dust sinuous on the dirt roads,
dust grained and deep in the seat of my pants,
on my face like ashes.

I have cozened you from the roots of gardens,
found you in dim rooms down on your broad back.
I was out of breath, too, afraid to move.

There was plenty of dirt on that day, and heat,
yet I did lean late after midnight to whistle
an old song over the chair where the wool you
weaved knotted what warmth
a dying woman can keep in her breath,
and you were cold. I am as sure it was so
as the season you called black August.

Who is accused in this? Not that grass
parched, ticking where I came to stand in
the glib knock of the dirt pressing you
dry as a bulb while the cicadas wailed. Does anyone
with red eyes and stunned tongue understand this?

I don't care that you died, I want to keep alive
the love you made good in me. So who can tell me

how to stop dreaming those bones charred by cold,
the frame of the stripped skin,
the real absence of eyeholes?

BACK RIVER WINTER

For some good time I mourned you only in walking
through heat-haze and the fat proud wild-flowers
where the fireflies waited for us to run.

But in winter which is infinitely young
with a rumpled white sheet that invites all
cessation to the tumbling pain in the nerves?

There are apples in the yard, red and soft.
Who would ask why they fell? What they say, buried
in their dark skins, their seeds more perfect than reason,

is less inaudible than weeping. I have some need
to speak of final things in my own tongue, perimeters
I must keep to like the cautious wheeling fishhawk

who eats the apples in bad times. Today in snow
I watched them peel a man from his tree-clenched car.
I saw the wrecker slide with its prize, go away

like a fat woman, like you, a kind of jolly dance
turned sour that with one finger I could blot out.
Then was gone. Was snow. Was mud bridging its wound

and not even a bluejay to break that vision. Yet
I did walk out by the river cheerfully feathering
the same sun I could pretend was my daughter's hair,

and in pines knotting up odd shadows, believe it
or not, I could imagine I heard the promised Christ
beautifully breathing that dead man's name.

Tonight someone in the cold will ask as I ask,
what is the trick of it? In this weather I think
I must learn how to walk out of despair, to see

what the apples fall into is a place without answer
or asking, and accept it as the fishhawk does, the man
who drives the wrecker and sings a song of one

woman he has not loved for the whole of a single night.
I must give over grief and begin in the winter
I love to love whatever believes in the good.

And if you should find me whistling your old fame
among great-grandchildren, remember it is what
you have taught me, and nothing less will I know.

The Gift of the Second Snow

When it stopped the sun suddenly poured
through the thorned black locusts
I had just been thinking
so peculiarly insistent
a symbol of numerous hurts
I hadn't lugged out
in the light of any poem.
That sun

slopped over those branches, quicksilvered
across the new lacey surf of the lawn,

rose up beyond the windowsill,
frothed against the glass
until I would let it in,
and though I hugged
at my abstract hurt
no thorns

I could feel snagged in any metaphysics
I spread out. I can tell you I was
unprepared for the swelling
your arms made at my neck
like a whispered joy.
Then I had to let out
the dog, turn off the TV,
give up my good excuse
to go on writing
hard things

and it was just then the children came
swaddled up like small firs, glittery,
speckled like a celebration,
their eyes pumping up
what was left of my heart,
so we went out for hotdogs,
and went all night on our
bellies under the black
locusts, until you
fell with me, soggy
in bed, in love,
in the dark.

JAMES BAKER HALL

I Always Thought

I always thought, how ironic
that in the end Beethoven
was deaf. But it seems now
perhaps not ironic at all,
but his body's understanding
of what it heard, and its genius
for the next move.

There is
a fifth movement to the Ninth—
silence. On the other side
of song is the universal hum.
And on the other side
of the hum, silence.

Lovers,
on their way there, sit facing
each other without words, sex
spent, their eyes closed, the
palms of their hands pressed
together, the nature of things
palpable in that gentle pressure.

There are two sources of light,
then, one overhead, one within.
First we must perceive that each
particular is lit at both ends.
It is fascinating to watch one
fire, enchanting to watch two,
drawing inexorably toward each
other. To witness their unity
in the center is rapturous.
We live at first in the light
of our senses, so sexy, sight,
touch, sound; then in the power
and glory of sharing them; and

finally in the rapture of their
disappearance.

Imagine the many
lights within the many worlds
all around you becoming brighter
and brighter, the many points
expanding toward a center, until
colors fade, shapes fade, names
fade, voices fade, until all
the particulars are consumed
in the manifestation of light
and silence everywhere!

The body
drops then its final weight,
words fall away, you fall away,
with a smile.

Imagine a rock
dropped in deep water, the circles
going out, and coming in,
simultaneously.

In Which the World Says What It Will Cost to Live Here

Pinned on the wall above my desk
is a note in my young son's wobbly
hand which reads, "Father, Father,
I want you." And another, "Dear Dad,
Please send detailed instructions
to develop negatives and prints.
I love you very much. I'm having
fun in school from Matt." And next
to that his younger brother's
latest crayon drawing, a scribbly
blue hillside with a tiny figure
on the horizon, a giant balloon
issuing from its mouth and inside

the balloon, in his 5-year-old writ,
his name. He entitled the picture,
“Winnie the Pooh calling Michael.”

This past summer we went swimming
often, and I remember how they
took turns hanging around my neck
and urging me into the deep water,
the bottom rough, the footing
unsteady, and how they would
scream with excitement, their
wild arms and legs clutching me
in a fit of fear and of trust.
We held one another so tight!
I would say now to each of them,
holding them tightly in deep water,
child, child, I want you too—
you are not in the best of hands,
my children, but you are in
the only hands that I have.

Item One in a General Theory of Things

—for Barry Spacks

I remember a scene from *The Sophomore*:
Harry Zissel happens to be across
the street from a big city phone company
at 5:30 when the operators & secretaries
get off.

All of a sudden the building
opens up and out pours a jackpot of women
in their summer dresses, 400–500 of them
beautiful.

Sometimes I think the whole
world has turned into a phone company
at 5:30. Sometimes I can hardly remember
seeing a man for days.

What's happened
to all the men? If I thought the rest
of them would disappear, and leave me
here, it would be one thing, but I can't
think men don't amount to anything any more
without thinking less of myself.

I can't
walk to work any more without falling
in love three or four times.

It's exhausting!
Where are all these women coming from?
I've got other things to do!

All Love

All Love begins in the cave
of self love, where we are
conceived, and proceeds up
the mountain toward love
of others, and toward the
final light.

And beyond
the image of the cave and
the mountain, and the journey
in time from one to the other,
is reality, the coincidence
of mountain and cave, the warped
time and space of experience
itself, in which the journey
up the mountain is also a trip
deeper into the cave, the self
other and the other self, in which
all movement falls out with every
step where it began, everything
everywhere, all the time.

Light
and silence, finally. Which is

love beyond sex and power, beyond
song, which is the world whole,
which is the world
in love.

The Wisdom of Photography

If we were patient enough
it would tell us the whole
story, from the cave
to the mountain top,
and beyond.

On a sheet
of white paper an image
suddenly appears.

We marvel
at that, as we should,
but we should also marvel
at its disappearance.

What
in a matter of minutes
came to be, slowly,
over the years, fades
away.

The paper becomes
white again. Then dust.
Then nothing.

What began
in worldly brilliance went
all the way, into wisdom,
and beyond.

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

Rags, Garbage, and Fantasy

IF ELEGANCE AND DIGNITY are qualities of the spirit, then rags and garbage are the natural habitat of the aristocrat. He does not repose in them as a child in nature, but accepts them as a test, the ineluctable antagonist of his instinctive style. You may recognize a princess by her sensitivity to a single pea under a mountain of mattresses; with equal assurance you may recognize a prince by the way he arranges his few filthy rags, by the way he carries a drooping daisy plucked from a dunghill, by the port (neither jocose nor disconsolate) of his skeletal umbrella on a sunshine day.

The best-bred display of breeding is made with minimal expense and, more importantly, with minimal effort. The two requirements are not by any means equivalent. A celebrated Japanese tea-master remarked one particular gate in the shogun's garden as a false note; it was, he declared, a little too rude and rustic, slightly pretentious in its blatant humility. A worthy tea-master! a sensitive shogun! He altered at once the comportment of the offending gate. When truly and naturally poverty-stricken, the dandy is liable to no such charge; since his rags are worn by necessity, not choice, only the form he imposes on them is his responsibility. He is thus a central figure for this bedraggled twentieth century, when even nature appears second-hand and contrived, and all mankind flaunts tatters made of yesterday's rags as it sinks steadily into an accumulation of today's garbage. If man was ever nature's child, he is so no longer; on the contrary, in an Oedipal violation of colossal proportions, he is either the murderer of nature or its self-conscious, responsible conservator. Thus even the natural is now man-made, man-protected, or man-controlled. Whales, once emblems of a fierce and cruel universe beyond man's wildest powers to strike, have become the objects of a protective campaign; and the once-divine power to impart or withhold life is crudely manipulated by pressure-groups—never more fitly so-called. Whether we now see the city as a refuge from the idiocy of rural life, or the natural existence as an escape from urban uproar, we live always among castoffs and leftovers, on which the mark of some social and practical decision is still legible.

Rags and garbage, a particular stage in never-ending cycles, are nothing but materials momentarily exhausted of their value by human wear or consumption. The polite name for garbage, "refuse," carries the crucial concept of human rejection. Second-hand clothing bears the implication that it wasn't good enough for someone else, but for the unfortunate without any self-respect it may, even as contaminated by the first owner, still be good enough. Garbage, as what someone has refused to eat, wears even more openly the imprint of the rejected; "Sheol," the Hebrew word for "hell," originally meant simply the garbage-dump of Jerusalem. Scavengers of all sorts are thus stigmatized as unclean. "Dog" and "pig" become terms of ultimate insult, and garbage-men, who simply carry the stuff away, are objects of avoidance; in India, they find themselves segregated into a pariah caste. The word "pariah," deriving from "drum," is itself an avoidance-word at second hand: the caste which it designates carried refuse and cleaned streets, but became known euphemistically by the most reputable of their occupations, the beating of the village drum. A British equivalent is the word "dustman" for a man who will pick up dust, indeed, if it is put out for him, but who is mostly concerned with what OED nicely refers to as "&c."

Nature then, even nature, "wears man's smudge and shares man's smell"; in harsh and horrible reality manywheres, but most of all in the depths of the living imagination. Even if the garbage-piles are split-second stages in nature's progress toward forests primeval, and the mountains of waste mere pimples on the rise and fall of slightly more substantial hills—even in a Grand-Canyon perspective of time—we can hardly help feeling the cycles to be in their rubbish-phase now. The feeling may even be right, but we entertain it in good part for reasons other than material evidence, reasons which exercise their own necessity over us.

Schliemann, digging ruthlessly through the rubble of nine or sixteen or twenty-three successive Troys in search of Homer's (it was actually amid the first junk he mingled contemptuously with other "modern" Troys and threw aside), demonstrated better than he ever realized how history heaps one trashpile atop another. History does not unfold: it piles up and is dug out. That has been true for a long time now. The first and most wonderful of books, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (of which *Finnegans Wake* is so lavish an imitation), tells us that its lore is immemorial, the entire book

having been written by the god Thoth, in whose divine nature all the thousands of scribes and copyists, who produced the millions of potsherds and papyrus-scrap in which the *Book* subsists, directly participated. The earliest book we have explicitly declares and rejoices in the antiquity of its wisdom, which is smeared and smelly with mansmell, *therefore* divine; and it celebrates all chaotic fragmentation as the work of a supernal and lucid intelligence. From these ancient perspectives, our sense that the modern world is exhausted and falling into squalor is not, indeed, negated; but it is qualified as simply one of several styles of feeling. We may actually, in our disappointment with the enlightenment myth, be falling victim to it—our dismay with the bloody mess of history rising from unacknowledged springs of expectation that history can or should be a tidy, sanitary process. Human rags and garbage are then the special badges of our shame, evidence of our wilful refusal to be clean, rational, and proper, as we could easily be if we followed our better natures. This is a defensible point of view, maybe, but it is not inevitable.

The last age to be interested in rags as such (not as momentary badges of oppression or vagabond freedom, but as ingredients of style) was the eighteenth century. The Newgate pastoral that Swift commended to Gay for writing held up before its audience a two-way distorting mirror—reflecting on the one hand the plight of the modern swain (dispossessed, exiled from his native soil, and chivvied into urban slums), on the other hand the state of modern society and government (the overworld), where thievery is organized as methodically as in the underworld. Pickpockets and prostitutes exchange with lords and ladies the compliment of reciprocal imitation; and the stolen rags of a drab thus stand for a whole system of dignities and emoluments filched by the house of Hanover from the now-destitute Stuarts, as well as for a whole system of violated nature and ruined shepherdesses. Implications are made explicit in names: Macheath is a Scot, for instance, therefore probably a clansman, an outlaw, and a Jacobite. (These are all ingredients of high style: he is not a pauper but a laird, not a thief but a soldier of the nation's rightful king, and what he wears is not a rag but the tartan plaid of an ancient and honorable clan.) In passing, we note further that Macheath is also a child of the unenclosed common, one of nature's noblemen; and his name chimes on that of Macbeth, a fellow-Scot who tried to usurp a

kingdom and failed through a weakness before women. The rags of the felons before us serve to diminish the larger actions which they shadow; the echo-actions serve equally to dignify, and render heroic, the criminals. The play consists simply of seeing these parallels and doing nothing about them, as it makes perfectly clear by exploding its own human consequences in the farcical ending. Rags are a powerful image throughout the performance; they dominate Gay's action by the sheer insistence of their presence. But the fact that men in rags instinctively duplicate the patterns of men in ribbons solidifies those patterns, rooting them in indigenous dirt, as straight pastoral would have rooted them in the soil of nature.

By contrast, the Brecht-Weill adaptation of Gay's burlesque as "The Three-Penny Opera" is loaded with Marxist, i.e., millennial, social commentary and expectation. The rags worn by highwaymen and pickpockets are a proletarian uniform, wrongfully imposed on them by a social order which can and will be changed. No particular joke is possible about the interchangeable fine manners of gentlemen and highwaymen, because there are no visible gentlemen, and if there were, they would be moral inferiors of the thieves. Peachum and Lockit, representing bourgeois morality, are the loftiest social class in view, and the lessons emerge (1) that bosses are greedy, (2) that proles would be good as gold if allowed to make a clean sweep of bosses, and (3) that rags, while emblems of present oppression, promise liberation and revenge in the future. The two versions differ as comedy differs from didactic melodrama.

Swift himself in his first full-scale satire, not only made use of shifting and overlaid rags as the emblem of modern style in philosophy and religion, he became one of the first writers actually to construct a whole book out of verbal tatters (Sterne, Flaubert, and Joyce are among his followers). A major point of *A Tale of a Tub* is that it consists of appurtenances and appendages, posturings and apologies, decorations and extranea, overwhelming a notable deficiency of central structure. The comic device is not anything Swift could have learned from Rabelais, Lucian, or Scarron; it depends on a self-conscious and contemptuous view of the modern age as contrasted with the ancients, which converts self-derision into a vehicle of historical criticism. Because modern men (including most notably the author of the *Tale*) are degenerate, they exist in moral and intellectual rags; if they chose to be whole of mind and simple of spirit, they might still emulate ancient magnanimity, under the

guidance of Sir William Temple. But they are incapable of that choice. Far from being an accident or an imposition, tatters represent a permanent spiritual state.

As the instance suggests, rags are always controlled, like other literary props, by a context; what they can be made to mean is elastic and various. Dutch genre painters, of whom the elder Pieter Breughel is one of the first and surely the greatest, seem to accept a high degree of raggedness as normal in their materials. Breughel himself certainly lived among and worked for people who were far from ragged in their dress; but, for reasons at which we can only guess, they liked to look at grotesque and frequently tattered figures in their paintings. Whatever Breughel himself felt about the filth and squalor he customarily portrays, his boors are customarily in rags, and his sales to men of wealth and distinction did not suffer. Commentators, rendered uneasy by so much routine frowziness in his world, tend to edge up on interpretations which attribute deliberate significance to it under a testudo of rhetorical questions. "Is it possible that . . . ?" or "May it not well be that . . . ?" Their uncertainty contrasts with the immediate import of rags in novels by Defoe (*Colonel Jack*, *Moll Flanders*) or Dickens (*Oliver Twist*, *Our Mutual Friend*). Like the dirt and squalor portrayed by Hogarth and Doré in their representations of London, rags are here the objects of finely focussed and quite unequivocal feelings.

Wearing rags, but wearing them with a deliberate difference, like clowns or mimes, is a way of rising above circumstance by style, a device of levitation which divides the world into horizontal levels and thereby denies any need for temporal or vertical advancement. If the nadir of misery can be transformed by a knack of gesture or expression into laughter, applause, and pots of money, then the way down and the way up are indeed one and the same; and there's no occasion to climb any visible or invisible ladder. The best way to rise is by falling; and this paradigm has had many applications off the formal stage as well as on. Within our own time, rags have had a very widespread vogue among the young, partly as protest against straight society, partly from a sense that being grubby is a way to be natural and therefore perhaps next thing to holy. When a snake-dance of such types invaded a graduation ceremony I was attending, they wore very ragged rags indeed, and a bare minimum of those—rags supplemented only euphemistically by paint and hair—to suggest, I suppose, that the agents existed above and

below civilized forms. Drugs would naturally encourage this sort of display, as in the instance they did; but so would any strong *other*-experience. Living in a different world, sensual, imaginary, and presumably better, the addict advertises by costume or behavior his contempt for this common and commonplace globe. Rags easily serve such an end; so, though with very different accent and feeling, the hermits of the Thebaid, or Saint Simeon Stylites and his ilk, cultivated rags and filth as a way to express their loathing of fleshly lusts and the world that caters to them. In thus acting out a disdain for middle-class decorums, rags may express an aloofness almost *dandy* in its sense of extreme style.

Especially nowadays, when shopgirls and countesses are masquerading as something equally remote from them both (whether whore or pre-pubescent), when movie actors are hard put to outshine shoe-salesmen, coping out of the competition by opting for rags is an obvious one-up alternative. It carries the special escape-mechanism that, on the face of things, one isn't really trying at all. The pre-tattered Brooks Brothers sport jacket, the Peck and Peck dress which is called, and is, "just a rag I threw on," but is visibly a Peck and Peck rag—these represent a highly contrived strategy for having it both ways.

To the serious taste of our age, second-hand may really be better than first: less pretentious, more authentic, richer in patina, more revealing of true gust. The principle is perhaps akin to that which declared bastards lustier and more vigorous than legitimate scions, because the offspring of pleasure, not obligation. So, when not encumbered by any dynastic obligations and pretensions to "originality," artistic work may be freer, more vital. Whether formed on these principles or not, the vogue is widespread for collage, *objets trouvés*, and mechanically multiplied images, all of which have in common a quality of playing down the uniqueness and originality of the art work. To pick something out of a junk heap or off a street corner and place it on a pedestal shows (or so we are to suppose) greater acuteness than creating after an imaginary model of one's own. The effect is obtained with minimum effort; it is shared in a specially intimate bond between artist and viewer; on both parts, it implies a purer act of intellection, in seeing through a perceptible barrier of unfamiliarity to a shape which is new only because of a common act of eye and mind. Like rags and castoffs generally, second-hand materials are of preference for a thoroughly

modern artist. They bear open witness to what scholarship is constantly reminding us, that we never observe objects with totally fresh, i.e., unprepared eyes. Since the experience is already contaminated by the viewer's expectations (themselves formed by his culture, his tradition, his prior definition of an art-object), the frank thing to do is to make unconcealed use of those expectations by crossing them up and doubling them back.

Thus Joyce, Eliot, and Pound, when they set about creating a literature of modernism, unanimously turned to a texture, if not a structure, of tags, allusions, quotations, misquotations, and phrases at second hand. What Eliot's personage calls "fragments shored against my ruin" are for Joyce and Pound the very stuff of history and psychology, the depth and movement of which are only to be measured by matching fragment with fragment. By patching together the rags of fable, folklore, and fiction, the writer in this vein may hope to suggest the seamless garment of total history, or some image of it. He readily avoids the appearance of preaching, and makes tangible use of the past as something more than the merely picturesque. For visibly secondhand materials inevitably create ironic duplicity because the object is seen simultaneously in two contexts, with a third meaning blossoming out of the distance or difference between them. How that meaning actually comes out matters, perhaps, less than that past and present have conspired in making it. An inherently eclectic age like our own, aware of several pasts in almost every present act, self-conscious and thought-bound like Prufrock, could hardly find a more appropriate style, whether in prose or verse.

Bloom, as Everyman, is of particular interest. Physically, he is a neat and cleanly Jew in a city of dirty Christians, yet he has dealt in old clothes and is mocked with the nickname "Ole Clo." His fondness for the well-worn and smudgy phrase is reinforced by his evident wish to have a well-worn and smudged wife. One of the many reasons why he is Jewish is that ancient history lives on in him past the term of its meaning; he is a fouled well of thought. Like his memories, his aspirations are compounded of clichés and formulas jumbled indiscriminately together. In the eyes of Dublin, he is a used, discounted, and despised article, invariably put aside or set down with a phrase of disparagement. As a creature of flesh, blood, and thought, he is nearly as scruffy as his sometimes-nauseous wife. But in their different degrees—she more than he—

both are transparent vessels of something else, containers of a truth and vision to which they themselves are nearly blind. This vision has nothing to do with the conscious mind, whose scraps and counters. Stephen Dedalus manipulates with the virtuosity, and often with the obtuseness, of a highly trained graduate student. In their differing degrees—Stephen more than Bloom—both are ragged men, nearly as hollow and disintegrated as Eliot's straw dummies. But Molly as Maya the weaver (Calypso, Circe, and Penelope, all weavers, are her avatars) will incorporate them and all men into her pattern. If anyone can, she will make whole cloth of their tatters.

Looking at *Ulysses* across this schema is probably good for *Ulysses*; it gets us out of some sentimental hangups about Bloom and Molly, and gives weight to the end of the novel, where weight has often seemed to be wanting. But it also leads us directly into *Finnegans Wake*, where it always helps to arrive with a sense of one's preliminary bearings. Of course if one thinks *Finnegans Wake* an eccentric venture, off the main path of modern perception and expression, then the fact that it is deeply involved with rags and garbage won't make much difference. But if one sees it as centrally involved with rags and garbage, that may constitute an argument that it's at the center of modern problems of perception and expression.

In the first place, it must be clear that the book is not much concerned with "characters," that is, with human nature; nor, consequently, with manners or morals, both of which topics predicate an individual identity. Because they are not properly individuals, but rather silhouettes and recurrent verbal-patterns, the characters of the *Wake* exist freely at several widely different periods of time, under widely differing physical forms—animal, human, vegetable, mineral, geographical, mythical, and religious, to name only a few. Their nature at any particular moment of the book, and their connections with their multiple analogues, are suggested by recurrent verbal tags and formulas. Like Schliemann, the digger into the *Wake* must always be guessing from bits and scraps of evidence what level he's at. His efforts are mimicked and encouraged at the same time by the story of a hen, Biddy Doran, who (apart from being a manifestation of ALP) may also be a phoenix or a barnacle goose. She is trying to decipher a letter (*The Book of the Dead*, *Finnegans Wake*, an ancient Irish inscription, any

historical document) which she has found on a dunghill (the grave-mound at Heliopolis, the delta of the Liffey at Dublin, any tumulus of any buried culture). What she has to go on are henscratches, of course, but also stains, rips, blurs, and smudges in the original document—plus potsherds, marrowbones, junk, and coprolites from the circumadjacent dunghill. Reading the *Wake* is reading the claybook of the earth itself, reading the record of history, reading the significance of human character—all of which are alike and equally piles of tattered and miscellaneous garbage through which the blurred outlines of a design can (perhaps) be perceived. The process works best if you're a bit abcdminded.

Doublespeech in all its various forms is the natural language of this sort of vision. Puns, palindromes, anagrams, and acrostics abound, along with citations, parodies, symbols, metaphors both buried and exploded, and those nameless misspellings which evoke from a familiar word unfamiliar, semi-relevant components and long-muted voices. Syntax serves an expressive end by choking and stammering over an excess of jostling, jumbled meanings; and lists proliferate wildly—lists overt and subsurface, lists relevant and irrelevant, lists simultaneously stuffed with detail and apparently vacant of significance. Like history's garbage pile, the list is theoretically endless. The 800 rivers of Anna Livia could just as well flow on toward 8,000. For whatever evidence one assembles toward the full story (which is all stories but also just one story), however subtly one interrogates and interprets the fragments, any selection of evidence is equivalent to any other selection, and all evidence is inadequate.

The *Wake*, which deliberately derives its materials from the commonest of sources—patches, clichés, stock formulas, and verbal refuse—deliberately takes as its central theme the prospect of resurrection. Finnegan lying dead at his wake is Finnegan about to wake up; dead as canned salmon, he is renewed as his offspring sit down to the family feast and joyously devour him. "Grampupus is fallen down, but grinny sprids the boord." It is not always, or indeed often, possible for anybody else to accomplish, but the wedding that Joyce celebrates in *Finnegans Wake* between the grim and the hilarious, the foul and the sacred, is close to a full artistic sacrament. The joy is, indeed, somewhat scraped up; Joyce, by the time he was done with it, seems to have felt the book as an incubus, and so it can be for the reader, who, as he reads, feels his mind har-

rowed by a revolution more permanent than anything envisioned by Chairman Mao. The *Wake* is a paradigm for the artist: a deploring and (identically, simultaneously) a celebration, an epic in black humor.

Garbage and carrion, as they remind us intimately of our own imminent corruption, raise more painful feelings than rags, and are the object of deeper, more intricate taboos. They are closer to the sacred, closer to the accursed, because nearer to organic, as against artificial process. Disintegration and decay are almost the essence of garbage; the basic emotional assumption is that it's all shit. But our feelings on the subject are curiously divided and entangled. When it is called "compost" or "humus," garbage takes on immediate overtones of life-giving natural process. Cow- and sheep-manure, guano and rotted vegetable matter are the material of so-called "organic" farming, healthful, and perhaps ennobling; chemical fertilizers are the antithetical, "plastic" materials. But what is euphemistically called "night-soil," though perfectly acceptable fertilizer in large areas of the world, is not so in the germ-conscious West.

Scavengers are considered loathsome, but not uniformly so; the rule (illogical as it appears) may run something like, "The bigger and more public, the more repulsive." Buzzards, hyenas, coyotes, rats, roaches, and down to maggot-flies have maintained a generally bad press; but ants are relatively well thought of as cleanly and industrious creatures (they scavenge chiefly the remains of small animals), and worms are accepted because they do their work decently under ground. The eclectic Egyptians included a jackal in their pantheon along with an alligator, and saw a sacred symbolism in the operations of the scarab or dung-beetle. Bacteria, which are such convenient and manageable scavengers, we tend to look on as friends to man, particularly admirable because they can be constrained or induced to do most of their work invisibly.

Human excrement itself is a learned dislike, therefore a source of guilty pleasure, even, occasionally, an emblem of social freedom. Very young children are quite proud of what they can produce, and many "uncivilized" (by which we generally mean "non-civilized") cultures look upon it with amusement or indifference, not antipathy. Under our conventions, talking about shit openly or covertly is an act of social and psychic revolt, often disguised as comedy. The tradition in literature runs from Rabelais to Sir John

Harington to Swift to Joyce (in subliterature from Joe Miller to Chic Sale); and Ben Jonson has a mock-heroic poem describing a shit-bedaubed journey by a couple of knights on the river Thames—a poem which adds a whole new facet to the curiously composite character of the author. Even Mark Twain had a scatological side; it is a quality that seems to crop out under pressure of collision between a strong super-ego and a primitivistic libido.

Of course excrement and garbage are automatically obtrusive topics any time one gets masses of people in one place; if not in any way urban phenomena, they become prominent in urban circumstances. Under the best of conditions, the megalopolis is only a week away from choking on its own crud; war or strikes bring the prospect immediately closer. And the fact is that industrial wastes, such as a modern city generates in quantity, are a good deal harder to dispose of than traditional trash, excrement, and offal. Anyone who has travelled across northern New Jersey, south Chicago, the London suburbs, or the communities peripheral to Milan, will not need reminding of the evidence. Slag-piles, ashpits, scrap metal, chemical wastes, and auto-graveyards (plus the smaller but more pervasive detritus of bottles, cans, tires, and indestructible plastics) do not absorb quickly into the natural cycles. They stay on hand, they pile up. There is no way to minimize this sort of thing, even if one wished to do so; it constitutes a vast and terrifying event. Loose talkers blame it on a profit economy, but it seems just as prevalent where production is for use, or is alleged to be so. If mass populations don't invariably equal mass economy, and mass economy doesn't equal mass squalor, the exception has yet to be established. Still, it's too fresh a topic, rooted too largely in statistics and too little in common experience, to have forced its way deeply into the artistic consciousness. Creative artists have a way of not living in areas of heavy pollution; their indignation with a garbage-economy may be genuine enough (as all sorts of very serious people sincerely believed during the 1930's in the historic mission of the proletariat), but it's a kind of learned indignation. It amounts to ideology rather than lived belief.

The deeper strain of feeling, as it seems to me, is not that we are drowning in our own wastes, but that we are, ourselves, that waste. The overpressure of people is constant. Every day of our lives we swim against a tide of alien faces, are forced astray by a swirl of

oppressive traffic; our sensations, feelings, and ideas, such as they are, would all turn out, if we could bear to analyze them, second-hand at best, or thousandth-hand if we weren't limited by pathetic ignorance. Seriously to contemplate one's abject personal triteness is probably the most painful act a man can perform: it is no meditation of a casual quarter-hour. Meeting every day as we do thousands of identical replicas of ourselves, feeling ourselves numbered and processed, catalogued and regulated by a network of impersonal forces, pressured from outside by opinion-makers and reduced within by psychological analysts to a bundle of predictable tropisms, we naturally have a sense that our identities have been contaminated, if not ironed out altogether. To reach what is genuine and individual within ourselves (if such a bedrock exists at all) is a work of immense concentration, most of which is self-impeding and self-frustrating, as when a muscle-bound man must struggle to hang loose.

A few years ago, José Ortega y Gasset gave a set of talks since reprinted under the title *The Dehumanization of Art*. They still read interestingly, but what they describe as an event in itself is likely to strike a modern reader as only the symptom of something larger, the dehumanization of people. What the mournful, magnificent elegies of Samuel Beckett describe is a perishing imagination, the death-throes of mind reduced from all its other enterprises to the desperate repetition of Descartes' minimal assurance: "I (still) think, therefore I (still) am." That a couple of his characters appear onstage in garbage cans, and another one is named after a piece of excrement has horrified people; but it fascinates them too, compelling their identification. The condition Beckett's characters share (frozen, immobilized, disintegrating, bored to death) appeals to the fantasy of his audiences because they recognize in it a stage of their own decomposition, actual or potential but inevitable. That people are garbage is no more true now than it ever was, but it is easier for everyone to suppose, for reasons of which the social psychologists can inform us at more length, perhaps, than we really need. We must all be conscious of mass populations and the weight imposed upon us by a commitment to history which has become more pressing as the world has shrunk. A blood-feud in Africa or Asia may at any moment blow-up into intercontinental ballistic missiles. The suicidal terrorist, who is such a special feature of our times, declares in his action that the enemy has made him a piece of trash, worthless for any other purpose in the world except explosion

against the object of his hatred. Less spectacular but more horrifying to the peripheral imagination are the torpid mega-populations of the sub-world—the abandoned waifs of Latin America, the used fellaheen of Egypt, the native populations of South Africa or Congo, the inert peasants of India—who accept without audible protest consignment to a world of filth and disease, gutters and garbage. For the dump-dwellers of Mexico City the world is a dump, as for the ghastly beggars of Calcutta it is an endless maze baited intermittently with a bit of edible filth. Against this structure of things, their imagination can hardly rise in protest; for their sort, things have always been as they are now, and herd-like resignation is inevitable. But through the rest of the world, precisely because they don't protest, the possibility of things being otherwise is naggingly present to us, and the silent reproach of such an existence gnaws at the conscience. Hence a pervasive uneasiness with the very idea of literature, as an enterprise undertaken in bad faith, which, if it's to be given any credit at all must somehow establish its own ratings. One way for it to do this is by self-parody—not parody of other books, but of the literary enterprise itself; another is by rooting itself in some form of non-literary language, not subject to the suspicions attaching to the esthetic. Both enterprises involve a shredding and tattering of arranged esthetic surfaces, a ripping apart of the very idea of façades.

Why, for example, should Donald Barthelme retell the story of Snow White except that it has been so vulgarized and infantilized as to represent literature in its last stages of decomposition? Why make fun of this story except because it is like all other stories, which are equally silly in the face of a modern Snow White's total ennui, the absolute nullity of the seven modern dwarfs, and our practical assurance that any reasonably intelligent wicked stepmother is bound to prevail over Prince Charming, that tailor's dummy? What is the point of pausing in the middle of the story to administer a multiple-choice short-answer quiz to the reader, unless to mock the pedantry of literary categories and values? Pausing to give criticism a passing kick breaks the story to bits and leaves character a shambles—but story and character never mattered to begin with.

The outline-character capering through a world of scraps and accidents, which the author himself derides as artificial, is too familiar as a modern type to need underlining. Queneau calls his persons "silhouettes," Mme. Sarraute reduces hers to "tropisms,"

Thomas Pynchon labels his protagonist “Stencil”; Landolfi and Borges, like Barth and Barthelme, build their stories around named persons who are little more than phantoms or formulas, to be seen through. Insofar as they involve people at all, fictions in this mode make use of dehumanized stick-figures with whom calisthenic verbal factorings can be performed—expansion, contraction, distortion, cross-multiplication, miniaturization, transmigration. Behind these capering shadows, curiously omnipresent but wholly unavowed, lies the transparent shadow of the author himself, the grammar of whose mind we are constantly conscious of exploring. Behind the vaudeville a strip-tease is in progress; among the tatters being discarded is literature.

All this emphasis on disintegration and decay doubtless sounds very gloomy; but in fact rags and garbage, apart from their obvious uses in black humor, provide a soil from which unforced gaiety can legitimately flow. The bourgeois, with his somber, respectable uniform, is the source, God help us, of authentic high seriousness; his precarious middle eminence, demanding that he be ‘umble, forbidding him to be vulgar, offers no security for derision or exultation. One has to transcend his innocent interest in being told a rousing good story, his desire for a safe and wholesome moral lesson, to reach the thin, high air that’s fit to breathe. Hardly anybody in real life would opt for destitution as a way of gaining spiritual insight; but precisely for that reason, it’s the business of literature as a surrogate form of experience, a symbolic act, to explore the strategies of total loss by forcing us to feel like Lear, Samson, Oedipus, Nagg, Nell, or Krapp. It’s arguable that our literary fascination with rags springs up when the reading public is comfortably clothed, and that garbage, or shit, is the natural fixation of a people with the most elaborate sewage-disposal system since the later Roman empire. How else are we, the reading public with our easy-uneasy circumstances, to know destitution, filth, and squalor, unless by an imaginative reading of them? The future may well have a hideous answer to that question, but, even so, Mithridates’ strategy seems applicable for the time being.

Some early artists in rags, like those unlikely bedfellows Swift and Piranesi, used them to contrast with the strong integrity of the antique world. For all their hectic elegance, people are the ragged vermin who swarm over Piranesi’s ruins, hopelessly diminished by the weight and dignity of the past. Just like Swift’s “modern” author, unless they will school themselves in the austere disciplines

of antiquity, nothing is left for them but posture and self-display. But Alessandro Magnasco, the Genoese painter of the eighteenth century, makes no such contrast. He simply saw the world under the aspect of rags and dirt. He saw it that way consistently, all the time. Because his subjects were often imaginative or fantastic, no such social distance is involved as with Breughel's boors. Magnasco's contemporaries, Guardi and Tiepolo, share many elements of his style, but never fail to make their paintings more ingratiating. Magnasco renders the world in flitters, and there is no knowing whether he thought it, thus seen, to be funny or horrible or commonplace. It is a completely open question, to which I do not know the answer; I do not know how to find out.

About Magnasco's notable predecessor in the art of rags, there is less doubt. Jacques Callot displays a caricaturist's exuberant delight in the ripped and torn, but he is not buried in it, like Magnasco. He always touches the sordid with the elegant; his wit does not preclude anger and sometimes compassion, but the quality of his greatness seems to transcend any of the particular themes through which it distills. He can sketch a couple of buffoons, a troop of gypsies, a ghastly battlefield, or the confusion and disorder of a vast fair, all with the same leaping, energetic line. That independence of any particular subject matter, that superiority of mind to material, is of course what every artist is out to intimate; and there we touch on the crux of a recognition problem. Any clever rascal may dally with the degraded or scruffy by way of implying his good faith on another level, but there is something in the full and proper transaction that transcends cleverness and devices. Callot's gypsies imply a relation to gypsies that goes beyond their ragged surfaces; his etchings of "The Fair at Impruneta" or "The Hanging Tree" imply the full man whose dignity would not allow him to obey a direct order from Louis XIII because it implied a disgrace to the prince of his native Lorraine. Rags and the common dirt were Callot's chosen materials, but he never touched them save in cleanliness of spirit. This distinction carries a general point as regards our analytic expectations. Bad mouth or soft mouth, both options represent styles of discourse easy enough to describe but beneath which lie strategies of such complexity, or sometimes of such simplicity and directness, as to baffle language altogether.

KATHLEEN SPIVACK

Work

She squeezes backseat in their car; her camera lies
clamped between her legs. They speed into the country.
She is the prisoner of two forty-ish married lovers
who have hired her to watch and photograph
and celebrate their loving, writing
on negatives forever their deliberate coupling.

Swaddled, she hugs herself, observing the couple:
the man drives, the wife says nothing. The road lies
straight through the woods. He knows the right
road by heart; exactly how to penetrate this country.
Now he stops the car. The nervous woman photographer
imagines how they will be, making love.

Unlocking the house, they enter, giggling. Love,
the trio knows, is what they're here for. Of the couple,
he appears more eager. He undresses. Photographs
of him come easily. They position themselves, lie
down together. She pulls shades. In the stillness of the country,
the photographer turns lights on, for the rite

demands bare angles, naked light. Now she checks the right
exposure, reading sex on her emulsions: the lovers
moan at her, strangers, from another country.
And she clicks, fixed to her lens, registering the couple
but trying not to hear them. Her gaze lies
flat against her camera. She photographs

their heat as composition. Sex is a photograph
of strangers, sinuous. Terrified, she writes
it down on film. She's spellbound while they lie
beneath her, working rapidly. They writhe, make love
more loudly now, on camera. Shooting the couple,
she starts to shake, standing in their country

house, trying not to enter, concentrating, their country
of mutual stimulation. Later, developing the photographs,
she observes the rinsed emerging couple
entangled systematically in sequence. Love
has never looked so cold, a teeth-bared animal rite
in focus, without meaning. But the photographs don't lie.

They lie in her darkroom, drying, always right.
In a country of couples, only she is truly in love,
they tell her, alone with her fixatives, her photographs.

ANNE S. PERLMAN

Poem For A Cousin

We rested lightly against you
for safe passage,
a river rock to cross from here to there.

This loss is too swift,
a dream cat
sliding over my doorsill.

If only we could recite
our tales of dread and disaster
(always with miraculous endings).
Familiar, permanent.

You were this family's vault of legends.
We knew the comfort of kinswomen,
flowing across our clannish field . . .
It was the stuff of our lives.

PETER H. LEE

Three Korean Poems

1.

Don't mock a pine
Twisted and bent by the winds.
Flowers in the spring wind,
Can they keep their brilliance?
When wind blows and snow whirls,
You'll call for me.

—*Prince Inp'yong, 1622-1658*

2.

Among lovely hills and waters,
Wind and moon are my hedge,
Smoke and mist my hut,
Poetry and wine my friends.
Who knows my joy
In this quiet, hidden place?

—*Shin Hui-mun, dates unknown*

3.

Deep among green valley grasses,
A stream runs crying.
Where is the terrace of songs,
Where the hall of dancing?
Do you know, swallow,
Cutting the sunset water?

—*Anonymous*

JAMES P. DEGNAN

On Career Drinking in San Francisco

READING THROUGH ONE of San Francisco's several mediocre magazines—*The City*, I think it was—I recently came across another reference to that silly phrase “San Francisco's proud literary tradition,” and I wondered for perhaps the hundredth time: What proud literary tradition? For the truth is that San Francisco, despite being a city seemingly created for writers of talent to write about, despite being clearly the most beautiful and, in many ways, the most sophisticated and cosmopolitan of American cities, despite being, as the ad men, the hacks, the flacks, the third-rate TV and movie producers have been telling us seemingly forever, “The Paris of America,” “Baghdad by the Bay,” “everybody's favorite city” and so forth, San Francisco has very little “proud literary tradition.”

Probably the only writer of major significance to live in and write much of value about San Francisco was Ambrose “Bitter” Bierce. Other than Bierce, as San Francisco columnist Herb Caen points out: “One thinks only of Jack London, Frank Norris, Gertrude Atherton, the early Saroyan and, possibly, George Sterling, a poet so bad,” Caen contends, “he makes the Zen Beats one with the Yeats-Keats.”

The truth is that San Francisco, for all its cultural pretensions, has never been much of a literary city, has never had much of a literary tradition, and doesn't have much today. It may be “everybody's favorite city” (travel bureau statistics annually show it to be the city most Americans want to visit); and it may be a city in which a number of well known writers live, but it is a city about which little of value—certainly little on a national level—is written. It is a city with no major publishing center; with no decent newspaper; with no magazine even remotely comparable in quality or national interest to *The New Yorker* or, for that matter, to *The Texas Monthly*.

I sometimes think that the only good things being written in and about San Francisco—things which, like many of the best local wines, seldom get out of the Bay Area—are being done by a handful of local columnists (the aforementioned Herb Caen is one) for what is very likely the worst newspaper (by conventional standards) of any major American city: *The San Francisco Chronicle*, a paper badly edited, atrociously printed and one that long ago abandoned—to the TV and radio stations and to conventional “good” newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*—the job of presenting the news. Of these columnists, the most consistently interesting and original is Charles McCabe, a writer who may be one of the great originals in American newspaper journalism.

Of McCabe's achievement, a publican friend of mine, paying McCabe the highest compliment, says: “The son of a bitch can write about anything.” What my friend means is that McCabe can make almost anything he writes about interesting, and interesting to an audience made

up, to quote McCabe, mainly of “unemployed house painters, used car salesmen, barflies, retired cops, bartenders, indigent longshoremen, and butchers who kite checks.” For this unlikely audience, McCabe, using prose liberally laced with words like “glabrous,” “archimandrites,” “callipygian,” “etiolated,” and “infundibulum,” writes regularly—and often brilliantly—about things that just aren’t written about in American newspapers: about Virgil’s *Georgics*, about the Senecan amble, about Horace Walpole’s letters (and that same gentleman’s impotence), about Swift and Montaigne and Dr. Johnson and Lady Mary Wortley Montague; about La Rochefoucauld, the Duc de Talleyrand, the literary salon of Madame du Deffand; about the canticles of William Boyce; about Botticelli and Raphael and what Lord Melbourne said about Raphael’s uncle, architect to the Pope; about the pronouncements of obscure Desert Fathers on the dangers of accidie; about eccentric Oxford dons of his acquaintance; about the pleasures of browsing the Bodleian; about being in Debrett; about having one’s shoes made at Lobb, one’s suits at Poole’s; about Lady Stanley Baldwin’s attitude toward the act of procreation: “Whenever I find myself in that unspeakable posture, I simply close my eyes and think of England.”

McCabe also writes, with vehemence, about America’s criminal lack of decent razor blades or edible mustard (Coleman’s Dry, a mustard practically never found in American restaurants, being the only exception) or drinkable beer (one or two ales, notably Rainier, excepted); about the style of Jack Kennedy—“I was never really sold on him until one day I saw him flip a coin and catch it palm down; after that, I never doubted him,” about the Cult of Honesty, the sort of thing that flourished in the sensitivity session atmosphere of the late 1960’s—“Beware the man who says he’s honest. He is almost certainly a liar. And almost certainly cruel”; about premarital virginity, he’s for it; about various nationalities—“Hell,” he writes, “is where the Germans are the police, the British the cooks, and the French the engineers”; about the Irish, of whom he is decidedly one—“Find an Irishman on a spit, and you’ll find another one to turn it”; about Irish mothers—“The Irish mother regards the pangs of birth as the price she pays for the possession forever and in fee simple, of the body, soul and gaiety of her children”—and of the Irish mother’s chief victim, the wretched, guilt-ridden, whiskey-soaked Irish son, raised, between the teachings of his natural mother and of Holy Mother Church (pre-ecumenical, anyway), in the firm conviction that “evil can be defined as anything enjoyable” and that “celibacy is an inherited trait.” Were there an Irish version of Albert Ellis’ *Sex Without Guilt*, such a work, McCabe maintains, doubtlessly would be called *Guilt Without Sex*.

But, above all, McCabe is at his best writing—to the infuriation of local temperance advocates—in defense and praise of his favorite subject and occupation: serious and dedicated drinking. In cranky and often marvelously perverse, inaccurate and self-contradictory columns—many of which are collected in his most recent and best book, *The Good Man’s Weakness*¹—McCabe, to “document” his favorite thesis—drinking is good

¹ THE GOOD MAN’S WEAKNESS, by Charles McCabe. Chronicle Books. \$6.95.

for you, abstinence bad—draws on authorities ranging from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare; to Thomas Aquinas; to Dr. Charles Berry, physician to the astronauts. “A HEW study” (a study only McCabe seems to know about), McCabe contends, “proves that people who take a social drink, and even those who take *many* anti-social drinks, are likely to live longer than those lugubrious chaps, the teetotallers.” The teetotallers, it seems, “shorten their lives by worrying about their health”; whereas, McCabe explains, “Hypochondria is not a thing you find much among the pot valiant.” Rather than worrying about their health, says McCabe, “these hearties are too busy reviewing things they are not altogether sure happened”; and, besides, they have the good sense to know that booze has a “pickling and preserving effect on the human frame.” As for Dr. Berry, he is, for McCabe, a rare and eminently wise M.D. because, as a “formula for all ailments,” Dr. Berry advises, according to McCabe: “Take some aspirin and Scotch. If this fails, take more aspirin and Scotch and go to bed. What the good doctor is advocating, if I read him correctly,” McCabe writes, “is getting blind drunk if the pain is great enough. In Dr. Berry’s sage utterance I find no hint of that dread medical word: Moderation.” And finally, with regard not only to the health of the body, but of the immortal soul, McCabe admonishes us to heed the counsel of St. Thomas from Book II of the *Summa*: “If a man deliberately abstains from wine to such an extent that he does serious harm to his nature, he will not be free from blame.”

In *The Good Man’s Weakness* and elsewhere, McCabe declares:

Look here, I don’t want to hear any more about the harm booze does. I’ve heard all about that, and it’s poppycock. The folk wisdom of a hundred cultures over many thousands of years shows that beer and wine and spirits serve as a pleasant and useful counter to the irritant called life. I’m interested in the good booze does, a good I’m convinced far outweighs the bad.

For McCabe, booze is not only the classic anodyne—“a snort or two of which makes the human condition bearable”—but (McCabe quotes William James) “the great exciter of the YES function in man,” the source, for many men, of courage and inspiration and the discovery of what is best in their natures. “I am certain,” McCabe writes, “that Winston Churchill’s habit of guzzling a quart or two a day of good cognac is what saved civilization from the Luftwaffe, Hegelian logic, Wagnerian love-deaths and potato pancakes. I am further convinced that “when Newton watched the apple fall, he was sozzled after a vinous lunch.”

“Don’t talk to me about all the brilliant careers cut short by booze,” McCabe admonishes.

Don’t talk to me about people like Dylan Thomas and Brendan Behan drinking themselves to death. I say, without booze as an ally, they would never have had brilliant careers to cut short. They’d probably

have ended up a couple of ribbon clerks. Without booze neither one of them could have cut the mustard; and, for that matter, neither could most of the Americans who've won Nobel prizes for literature. All of the six, save one, were hard boozers, and four of them, by AA standards, were alks. As for the business tycoons who, if it weren't for their booze habit, would be back in Phoenix cutting hair, the number is extraordinary. The truth is that there have always been men so inhibited by their moral training or some other cause, they repress their true natures and talents, artistic and otherwise. To release these natures and talents—which booze has been doing since Adam and Eve cut out of the Garden—can be nothing but a certain good. Many a man who couldn't get invited to a hot dog stand when sober, turns out, after the third or fourth, to be an amusing companion fit to sup with scholars and gents. Don't rap anything too hard that provides a release from the prison of self. Why, if it weren't for the liberating qualities of Guinness and Paddy's and such, the population of Ireland would be damned near the ideal proposed by the Zero Growth people. Be assured, if the old man hadn't been fired up with Dutch courage supplied by Irish booze, not many of my friends and relatives would be around to tell the tale.

For McCabe, drinking is a career, "a dangerous career, to be sure," he writes, "but then so are other analogous callings, stalking the Indian tiger," for instance, "or nipping up the Matterhorn or living with a woman." Success at career drinking, McCabe explains, like success at the aforementioned activities, "is a matter of courage, and control is a part of such courage." Unlike the drunk—"a fellow whose manners become offensive under the influence of alcohol"—and the alcoholic—"one who, because of alcohol, can no longer do an honest day's work," the successful career drinker is the drinker with the wisdom to learn his limit and the courage to respect that limit, "falling from his high standards once in a while, of course, as one does when following all strenuous disciplines."

Properly conducted, McCabe explains, career drinking should be practiced in suitable bars, saloons and public houses ("only dipsomaniacs, people who really hate booze, drink by themselves"); and such institutions, because they must live up to the very high standards set by the career drinker, are not numerous. To be worthy of the career drinker's endorsement, says McCabe, drinking establishments, with a few exceptions, "must not be decorated with outside neon, unless the neon is broken." Nor should such establishments have names like "The Pink Panther or The Anxious Asp or The Dreamy Lagoon." Nor—again with the exceptions that prove all good rules—should such institutions be involved in activities tangential to their essential purpose, which purpose is the "pouring of drinks in exchange for money." This, McCabe writes, "eliminates lunchrooms and all joints with floor shows or dance floors." In establishments worthy of the career drinker, "the focus of life is on the bar itself, and the people on either side of it."

Additional characteristics of the career drinker's kind of place, to paraphrase McCabe, are: 1) Such a place always serves an honest drink for a

fair price. Career drinkers, even if they are affluent, consider it a matter of pride not to overpay. Hotel bars and other such places that cater to tourists and conventioners are, therefore, almost always excluded from the career drinker's itinerary. 2) Establishments fit for the career drinker operate from the a priori assumption that bars are the natural habitat of men and therefore take a dim view of female boozers, especially those whose intention is the cadging of drinks and/or male companionship. The career drinker wants no distraction in the pursuit of his life's vocation, and his amatory life—such as it is—is something he keeps separate from the practice of his profession. 3) Finally and above all else, establishments deserving of the career drinker's patronage are those dedicated to the vigilant protection of the career drinker from his natural enemy who is, to quote McCabe, "the dreaded amateur."

When McCabe talks about amateurs he's not just talking about people who drink things like Frozen Daiquiris and Black Russians; and he's not just talking about people who drink on occasions like New Year's Eve or St. Patrick's Day—occasions when no self-respecting professional would be caught practicing his art; when McCabe talks about the amateur he is talking about the drinker who may have been consuming conventional booze in bars for a good part of his lifetime but who is too dense and insensitive and boorish to learn the rules, the etiquette of drinking. This "laddie is not hard to identify," says McCabe. First, "he's never learned to appreciate things that to the professional—on either side of the plank—are pleasing to observe: the orderly array of bottles, the clean mirrors, the deft skill of the publican blotting a freshly written check on a clean white bar towel." The amateur "has never learned that you don't intrude on other people's conversations or stand in front of another man's drink or jump on an empty bar stool without inquiring first. He's never learned that you don't pound the bar or snap your fingers—that the professional merely nods his head when his glass needs filling." The amateur "is interested in being one of the mob and is generally a hostile, insecure type. He usually can be spotted eyeing himself in the mirrors and not being too decisive about what to drink." Another infallible sign of the amateur, McCabe declares, is his "detestable habit of pounding the dice box when he is rolling for drinks." For the professional, McCabe explains, "rolling dice is a simple skill, though acquiring it sometimes requires a painful novitiate. You let the cup barely touch the bar, and adroitly withdraw it from the dice, which then nicely and naturally and—*quietly*—take their position on the plank. Those clods who pound the dice are trying to prove something," McCabe continues, "and I know what it is: They're trying to prove they are men. And there is nothing more tedious than a fellow who is doubtful about his gonads."

In establishments worthy of the career drinker's patronage, the career drinker is protected from the boorish assaults of the amateur 1) by other career drinkers who, over many generations, have worked out subtle and not so subtle systems for ostracizing the amateur; and 2) more importantly, by the infallible authority of the "potentate who runs the place," by the publican who, in the best career drinking spots, usually

serves as both owner and tender. This benevolent despot—"who in England," McCabe writes, "is called governor, and for good reason"—knows only too well that the relationship between himself and his clients is that of father to children—children who must be constantly taught and reminded of their manners if peace is to be kept in the house. To accomplish this worthy goal—which is to say, to keep amateurism at a minimum—the good publican, says McCabe, may merely threaten—e.g., post signs like "Our prices change subject to the attitude of our customers"—or he may actually resort to punishment, such punishments, for example, as suspension of drinking privileges or suspension from the premises or, most fearful of all: the dread 86, for which read, total banishment. "To be 86'd from a good bar," McCabe writes, "is like being blackballed from the Pacific Union Club, or worse. Guys have been known to stay home with their wives, read improving books, and go to Mass and Communion, out of the sheer shame of it all."

(Like the martini, the 86 originated long ago in San Francisco, but—again, like the martini—exactly where and how in San Francisco no one seems to know. One theory has it that years ago when a customer got too obstreperous at the bar, the owner would order the proof of his whiskey cut from 100 to 86. But this, argues McCabe, doesn't work, because bourbon and rye, "the favorite drinks of America in the past century, were not until twenty or more years ago sold at anything less than 90 or 100 proof. And Scotch was not fixed at 86.8 until early in the century." Another theory has it that the 86 came from some obscure local ordinance giving the owner the right to refuse to serve an objectionable customer; but, says McCabe, "no one has ever found this particular bit of law." McCabe's own theory is that somewhere along the line, a bartender—perhaps as loaded as the contentious customer he was confronting—confused the owner's shout of "Nix"—i.e., "get rid of the bum"—for "86".)

Although McCabe has practiced as a career drinker in bars all over the Western World, headquarters for him, as for so many of his kind, is San Francisco, America's most bibulous city. Choosing as his motto—"Productive boozers are the bane of moralists"—McCabe begins his day as a professional drinker by working a two to three hour shift at his typewriter, cranking out his five-day-a-week column. Then, at about 10 a.m. or so, he totters down from his Telegraph Hill apartment to one of several of his favorite workingmen's saloons in the vicinity of Upper Grant Ave.—e.g., Mooney's or Gino and Carlo's—where, while reading the *Chronicle's* "accounting of the grandiose and pointless cruelty of mankind the day before," he consumes in silence ("I like to be alone in public") what he calls "The Breakfast of Champions": i.e., "two or three or four bottles of a tippie known in the less respectable premises of Frisco as The Green Death." What McCabe is talking about is the potent Rainier Ale, a beverage that comes in green bottles and reputedly possesses—despite its nickname—remarkable curative as well as intoxicating properties. "Most American beer," McCabe rightly declares, "is something the Elizabethans would have reserved for traitors." It isn't beer

at all, it is "imitation beer, mostly made from rice instead of malt and hops." And, even worse from McCabe's viewpoint, the alcoholic content of such beer is usually under 4% alcohol (the content in California is even less). Rainier, on the other hand—in part because it calls itself ale, but mostly because it has a long and proud reputation to uphold—has an alcoholic content of well over 4%—connoisseurs estimate anywhere from 7% to 12%—and is as rich in malt and hops as old fashioned home brew. "The presence of Rainier Ale on the premises," McCabe says, "may not be an infallible sign of the good saloon, but it is certainly a good sign."

As he consumes his breakfast of beer, McCabe says, "the sap rises slowly" and the moment gradually comes when "I know I am ready to take on the human race," a "dark task" he usually performs in one of several of his favorite businessmen's bars—The New Pisa, for example, "which pours the biggest 75 cent glass of whisky in town," or Perry's or The House of Shields—where he drinks the first of numerous scotch whiskies for the day and "swaps lies" with various members of the financial, political and legal communities.

Largely as a result of his excursions into the drinking world of San Francisco—excursions which give him much of the material for writing not only about the drinking scene, but about virtually every aspect of life in the City—McCabe, as I have said, produces some of the best writing being done in and about San Francisco today. It is writing free of the clichés characteristic of most writing about the city, e.g., of Herbert Gold's trendy pieces for *Playboy*. It is writing that in the freshness and honesty of its details and in the sharpness of its insights is reminiscent of the sort of thing E. B. White did for the New York of the late 1940's, a city in many ways similar, in spirit at least, to today's San Francisco. When White, in his classic essay "Here is New York," captures the fleeting pleasures of drink and youth and love in one marvelously poetic phrase—"the brief medicinal illusion of gin"—I am reminded of McCabe. And when White, in that same splendid essay, sums up the fascination and attraction of the New York of 1948—a city whose neurosis had not yet become today's necrosis—with the insight that "New York blends the gift of privacy with the excitement of participation," I am reminded of McCabe's doing a similar thing for today's San Francisco in his remark: "San Francisco is the only American city that takes wine for granted"—an insight that says more than volumes about what the City is and why it appeals to so many.

Because of what a New York writer calls his "Friscoophilia," McCabe, it seems, is constantly being challenged to defend the city of his choice from the barbarous attacks of tourists and infidels who do not share the Great Tippler's adoration of America's career drinking capital. "If San Francisco is such a great place to live," McCabe was recently challenged by an irreverent Midwesterner, "why does it have the nation's highest rates of alcoholism and suicide?" Without hesitation, McCabe responded: "Why, for the simple reason it's the finest place on earth to drink yourself to death."

JOHN SIMON

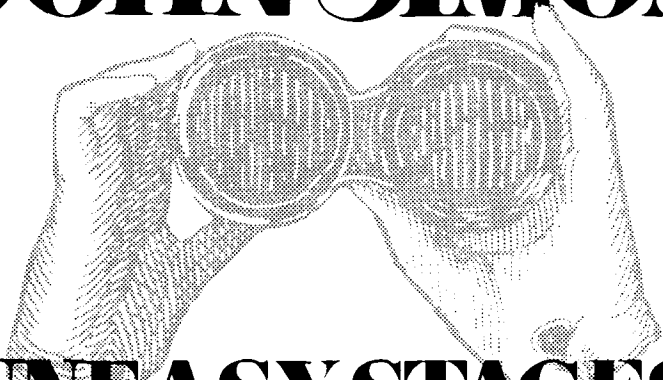
Theatre Chronicle

THE MORE PRESTIGIOUS PLAYS of the season have, once again, come to us from, or by way of, Great Britain; they illustrate, even in what is good or, at any rate, noteworthy about them, how difficult it is to be a playwright in our time, and to what desperate lengths one is driven to be a successful one. In an interview in *Theatre Quarterly* (May-July 1974), Tom Stoppard rather touchingly observed, "For me, it is such a relief to get an idea! I know there are writers who are not going to live long enough to do justice to all the ideas they have, but to me it's like being struck by lightning—and I feel just as powerless to *make* it happen—even, as it were, by hanging about under trees in thunderstorms." If you look at Stoppard's *oeuvre*, which thus far numbers (discounting radio and television dramas and an early novel, *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon*) six stage plays, you are struck by a growing cleverness, culminating in the current play to reach Broadway, *Travesties*. As conceptions, though not necessarily as plays, these works are indeed bolts of lightning, and it is no wonder they strike rarely.

What they all have in common to some degree is what I have at various times described with images culled from the animal and insect worlds, where the eggs or larvae of one species may be unconsciously hatched by the efforts, or fed by the very organisms, of another species. This parasitic quality, so manifest in *Travesties*, was scarcely less so in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, where the play is the obverse, tragicomic side of *Hamlet*, as seen by those two subaltern figures, and takes place before, during, behind, and in between the events of Shakespeare's tragedy. Similarly, the one-act *After Magritte* begins with a bizarre *tableau vivant* reminiscent of a Magritte painting, then proceeds to unfurl a tortuous and far-fetched but not absolutely impossible tale that explains and simultaneously recomposes that initial tableau, which we see at play's end along with its explication. Though Stoppard's play is not hatched in any specific Magritte painting, its nest is clearly the Magrittean universe.

The Real Inspector Hound, probably Stoppard's most satisfying because least assuming and dragged-out play, is a long one-acter in which two drama critics watch an onstage performance of an Agatha Christie-like murder mystery. The play-within-the-play is a spoof of the isolated-country-house-thrillers, and the play itself a splendid satire on critics and their intramural rivalries, their idiotic prereviewing of a play with grandiloquent commonplaces, their discussion of such trivia as the fact that one of the actresses in the thriller may become the special protégée of the elder critic. With this the third, Pirandellian motif begins to unfold: the play they watch lures the critics into participating in it at the cost of their lives. This can be taken as an allegory of art impinging on life, as a metaphysical notion that all life is really theater—the *theatrum mundi*, or simply as a piece of ingenious persiflage. For all this, the play on stage comes across simple

Two by **JOHN SIMON**



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SINGULARITIES

Essays on the Theater 1964-1974

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RANDOM HOUSE

and untroublesome, and its mild parasitism on the Christean thriller is harmless, unpretentious, and engaging.

Jumpers is not so clearly dependent on any one host organism. Here the husband's world is that of classical and contemporary philosophy and its *Problematik*, while the wife's world is one of musical theater, sentimental daydreams, and adulteries. What connects them is, mainly, what is happening on the moon where, transmitted via enlarged telescreen, British astronauts can be seen making a balls of it. The moon is part of the cosmic and metaphysical speculations of the husband, and also, through the songs she used to sing as a chanteuse, one of the wife's chief *lumpen*-romantic images. There are many other realms of imagery in the play, but the philosophy-music hall-moon triangulation seems to be the basic one, further connected with the "jumpers," those physical-metaphysical gymnasts—philosophy professors doubling as vaudeville-athletes—whose human pyramids and trampoline jumps may be taken as symbolic attempts to storm the heavens where Luna, Love, and the Lord may dwell—or be debunked. Convoluted as it is—far beyond my simplistic outline—this is nevertheless Stoppard's most independent, least parasitical play; even so, it does use the idioms of philosophy and the music hall rather as the earlier plays used *Hamlet*, Magritte and Agatha Christie.

Enter a Free Man, which in an initial, TV version harks back to 1963, is Stoppard's earliest stage play, although it wasn't seen theatrically till 1968 in London. Here the author is still writing in a basically realistic style, even if the work marginally partakes of Absurdism. In this fairly primitive play, the protagonist is an inept, addled would-be inventor, who feels misunderstood by his patient drudge of a wife and swinging daughter (who nonetheless supports the household with her paychecks from Woolworth's), bullies them about, and periodically walks out on them, without ever getting farther than the pub, however. There one evening he meets the man whom he takes for his future business partner in marketing his latest invention, and the girl he expects to be his mistress and soulmate. Everything proves to be delusory—the partner, the girl, the invention—and, prodded by angry but sobering harangues from his daughter, herself disillusioned in love, our hero finally appears to accept reality: he proposes to apply on the morrow for the government assistance owed him as a veteran, and stop dreaming about striking it rich with his ludicrous inventions.

On the face of it, this play does not live off any previous construct. Viewed more closely, though, it is a somewhat stylized version of the typical boulevard play about the unhinged father, who, instead of being a solid provider, goes off on wild goose chases and leads his family to potential or actual ruin. The prototypes, on a much higher level, may have been *The Wild Duck* and *The Father*, but the immediate ancestors are *Death of a Salesman* and its blatant British derivative, Robert Bolt's *Flowering Cherry*. In a very real sense, Stoppard's play leans on these precursors, while adding certain absurdist trimmings borrowed primarily from Pinter and N. F. Simpson.

Still, *Enter a Free Man* is less of a parasitical play than a derivative one. It

also exhibits many of Stoppard's future fortes and foibles: witty exchanges in which a single word or image is turned amusingly every which way; and the inability to keep any character, even the silly inventor, from becoming uncharacteristically clever. But the new Stoppard play, in which these strengths and weaknesses fulgurate, is also the perfect parasite: *Travesties* feeds off *The Importance of Being Earnest* both thematically and stylistically. The play concerns the imaginary interaction (or lack of it) among James Joyce, Tristan Tzara and Lenin, all of whom were in Zurich in 1917. It also and especially concerns Henry Carr, a minor British consular official, whom the play promotes to consul. The historic (if that is the word for it) Carr played Algernon in a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* by the English Players, whose business manager was James Joyce. The production and Carr were a success, but a squabble ensued, Carr claiming that he was not reimbursed for a pair of trousers he bought for the play, and Joyce accusing Carr of making off with the money for five tickets. There was a suit and countersuit, with Joyce emerging as the Pyrrhic victor; later, he had the further satisfaction of immortalizing Carr as an uncouth English soldier in *Ulysses*.

The play barely touches on this litigation, concentrating instead on imaginary encounters between Carr-Algernon and Tzara-Jack and two wholly fictitious characters: Gwendolen, a sister of Carr's, and Cecily, the pretty Marxist librarian at the Zurich Public Library, where part of the action is laid. In them, we have the basic Wildean foursome, to which Stoppard adds the manservant Bennett, named after the actual consul and modeled on Wilde's Lane, and a surrogate Lady Augusta Bracknell in the person of Joyce, on the sly excuse that the novelist's birth certificate erroneously listed his given names as James Augusta (for Augustus)! The Stoppardian superimposition, which uses some Wildean situations and lines intact, while rewriting others partly or nearly totally, now concerns a kind of debate between art (the Wildean substructure, Tzara's various defenses of Dadaism as well as enactments of it on stage, Joyce's occasional literary pronouncements) and life (World War I, Lenin's incendiary writings produced at the Zurich Library and his elaborate strategies to get back into Russia.) Henry Carr remaining through all this a foursquare British bourgeois. Yet the schema is too complicated even for Stoppard, who cannot really fit in Lenin and his wife, Krupskaya. Ideally, they ought to be Canon Chasuble and Miss Prism, but that would require bending even mock-history farther than it will go.

Another way of looking at the play is to view Henry Carr as the average man with vague literary and political pretensions caught between artistic revolution (Tzara, Joyce) and political revolution (Lenin). But here Stoppard runs into another problem: for whatever reason (possibly excessive respect for Marxism), he refuses to fabricate anything about the Lenins, let alone turn them into comedic figures. Instead, their dialogue, except for a few trivialities exchanged in Russian (allowing for a pun, not in the published play, on *da* repeated twice and Dada), their dialogue comes scrupulously from their published speeches and writings, and is in no way

travestied. Consequently, a very big humorless chunk of Act II, concerned with Lenin and Krupskaya, does not belong in *Travesties* at all, except that the Lenins were in Zurich and fit into the general revolutionary theme.

To complicate matters further, because Joyce made up limericks, one scene is entirely in limericks; because Tzara cut up texts and pulled them out of a hat, word by random word, to make up Dadaist poems, a couple of short scenes are, as it were, pulled from a hat. Because hats were important to Tzara as unreimbursed trousers were to Carr, hat and trousers references and images pervade the dialogue, sometimes excessively. Because the entire play is introduced by, and to a large extent a reminiscence of, Carr grown old, there are "time slips," *i.e.*, quasi-identical scenes enacted successively with differences representing the lapses and vagaries of a senile memory. And there are still other, quite gratuitous, elements thrown in, *e.g.*, a bit of Shakespearean persiflage, a scene from *The Importance* rewritten as musical comedy, etc. Most disturbing, though, is the Stoppardian inconsistency about character, so that the generally ludicrous or slightly touching buffoon, Carr, becomes at times an acerbic and sophisticated mouthpiece for the author's self-doubts: "CARR: . . . Art is absurdly overrated by artists, which is understandable, but what is strange is that it is absurdly overrated by everyone else. TZARA: Because man cannot live by bread alone. CARR: Yes, he can. It's *art* he can't live on."

What is Stoppard up to in this wittily allusive, often raucously funny, for considerable stretches aridly didactic, and, finally, shapeless, unfulfilled play? Once again he seems to be concerned with how fantasy might become life, or life fantasy; or how the same set of ingredients might be reshuffled for diverse purposes and contradictory effects. Stoppard's friend and admirer, the usually astute Clive James, has come up with a curious paean to the playwright in "Count Zero Splits the Infinite" (*Encounter*, November 1975), in which Stoppard is presented as the literary equivalent of Einstein, and his plays as dramatizations (not necessarily conscious) of the theory of relativity and other discoveries of contemporary physics. So James writes that "the chill which some spectators feel at a Stoppard play is arriving from infinity," and—after many supposed parallels that I, in my ignorance of Einsteinian physics, can neither accept nor reject—concludes: "It might be only in Stoppard's enchanted playground that the majestic inevitabilities of General Relativity can be reconciled with the Uncertainty Principle or quantum physics, but Einstein's lifelong search for the Unified Field was the same game, and *he* believed in intuition. . . ." Perhaps someday James will favor us with a little play about Einstein, Max Planck, James Jeans, Wittgenstein and Stoppard all meeting accidentally in a dive on Greek Street in Soho and enacting a quaint tragedy . . .

Whether or not Stoppard succeeds in putting Einstein on the stage seems to me less important than whether what he has put there is a play. James also notes *en passant* that early and late Wittgensteinian concepts appear in Stoppard's work, only to be transcended in the direction of

Einstein. In a similar vein, Austin E. Quigley has just published a book-length study, *The Pinter Problem*, in which Pinter's plays are explicated in terms of Wittgenstein and other linguistic philosophers. Having struggled through Professor Quigley's book, I find Pinter no more explained, humanized, or justified by linguistics (which I can vaguely follow) than Stoppard is by physics (which leaves me behind), and I am not even going to open the notorious can of worms about whether Pinter has read Wittgenstein & Co., and whether Stoppard, even if he has glanced at them, has understood Einstein & Co. What I will say, though, is that if *these* are the theatrical equivalents of those recondite intellectual disciplines, they (a) do not work very well as theater, and (b) merely show to what desperate lengths playwrights are driven, consciously or otherwise, to get their material.

Which brings us back to the question that haunts dramatic, as well as other, criticism today: What is there still left undone? Or: How can one still say something new? In this regard, Alan Ayckbourn is an instructive case in point with *The Norman Conquests*, his new London and New York hit, while his smash from last season, *Absurd Person Singular*, continues gamely on Broadway. Ayckbourn, who is often called the British Neil Simon, seems to me the more interesting playwright of the two because, although likewise basically a *boulevardier* with hypertrophic ambitions, he gets closer to that Something Bigger than Simon does. Yet even Simon has exhibited some proto-Stoppardian footwork when implanting his last plays into Chekhov and the Book of Job. Ayckbourn, however, is more imaginative and original, even when resorting to versions of the Stoppardian games with time and space.

In his first play seen here, *How the Other Half Loves*, Ayckbourn used the same stage space to represent two separate houses simultaneously, so that events from different times and places, involving three married couples, evolved before our eyes more or less concurrently. People from different but remotely connected households were wandering past one another without seeing or hearing what belonged to the other household, and the action shifted blithely from one time or place to another, so that even two dinner parties at two different times and places were enacted around the same table simultaneously. In *Absurd Person Singular*, there were again three married couples, connected by business and social ties but very different from one another. Each of three acts was a New Year's Eve party as seen from the kitchen of, first year the one, next year the other, the third year the third of these couples. In *The Norman Conquests*, the schema has been expanded: there are still three couples, but there are also three full-length plays. Here we have a family weekend at Mother's house; but Mother, a bedridden termagant, is upstairs and never seen. She is looked after by her spinster daughter Annie, who is about to go off on a "dirty weekend" with Norman, who is married to her skeptical, efficient, myopic career-woman sister Ruth. Also present are Annie's and Ruth's defeated brother Reg, married to Sarah, a monster of a busybody, from whom he escapes into inventing board games or making toy airplanes. Norman, the assistant librarian whose escapade with Annie is foiled, is the unstill

center around which everything revolves; he is childish, clever, egocentric, given to comic tizzies and tragicomic tirades, full of verbal and sexual energy, and convinced of his role as joy-bringer to all women, to the tune of at least three per day. Lastly and leastly, there is Tom, the veterinarian, dull and tongue-tied almost to the point of retardedness, who is Annie's platonic suitor and never comes out with his suit or much of anything else, merely hangs around inarticulately and interminably.

The three plays cover roughly the same period, late Friday afternoon through Sunday, but with some significant overlappings; they tell the same story, but *Table Manners* takes place in the dining room, *Living Together* in the living room, and *Round and Round the Garden* in—you guessed it. The idea might have come from a line of the Player in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*: "Every exit is an entrance somewhere else." Each play fills us in on what happens to the characters when they walk off the stage in one of the other two plays. The whole trilogy could be viewed by Asmodeus, the demon who lifts the roofs off houses, as a play in six acts and twelve scenes running simultaneously or slightly before or after one another; for the rest of us, it is three plays interweaving or rethreading their progress, to be seen either in one day (as the critics were shown them) or on three separate evenings (as most audiences are seeing them).

There is an immediate problem here. The story is always the same, with no change in point of view; this is not Proust or even Lawrence Durrell—we do not see identical events through different eyes in each play. The vision is always that of the omniscient author, who merely chooses to cut his omniscience into three slices. What happens in another room at the same time, or in the garden just a bit before or after, or even during a period (this happens once) covered only in one play, does not alter the fact that we are being sold the same story on the installment plan, with only the clock moving back almost but not quite to the same time as each new play begins. That means that we witness a few more incidents, as well as some additional details about the conflicts, outbursts, and sex play (mostly aborted) of a family weekend, but do not learn much from the parlor and garden plays that we couldn't gather from the dining-room one, the best of the three. Well, yes—we do find out that Norman, whom we take at first for a complete windbag and goof-off, may, through sheer bluster, persistence, and irrepressible libido, end up someday sleeping with both his sisters-in-law. Or, again, he may not.

Neither Norman, nor the entire sextet of *dramatis personae*, deserves more than a single play. There is just enough comic invention here to make a very solid boulevard comedy free from longueurs. Ayckbourn's characters are sufficiently witty, ridiculous, or stupid; the situations are outlandish enough in their middle-class way; and when the dialogue flags, there are always catchy sight gags rushing in. But only for the duration of one play; spread out over three, bald patches show up like creeping alopecia, and many of the amusing things in the subsequent plays are only wigs made out of the fallen hair of the first. We get permutations on the same gag instead of genuine comic increments. There is even a tactical problem: to see all three plays in one day is tiring if not tiresome; to see

them on separate evenings means no longer recalling some of the words and deeds from the *other* room that are in some footling way intensified or belied by the words and deeds in *this* room. Such minuscule developments or inconsistencies must register as double or triple exposure in our minds to justify their existence; let forgetfulness take over, as it all too logically does, and the piquancy vanishes.

I am inclined to believe that even Ayckbourn knows that he has spread himself too thin here; but I also believe that he did so deliberately, for the sake of originality, of playing around with time and space—to impress us by writing not only with the pen but also with the slide ruler. It takes fancy calculation and logistics to make six people provide a sufficiency of action in three different places more or less concurrently; the playhouse becomes a puppet theater in which our waning interest can always transmute itself—is, at any rate, invited to do so—into admiration for the number of strings the one puppeteer can manipulate. I suppose that we are even expected to draw little mental diagrams to verify whether all the entrances, exits, and events interconnect properly, and then try to figure out how the author managed it. With tiny dolls moved around three miniature sets? With advanced mathematics? By writing a Wagnerian superdrama, then deftly applying the scissors to it? As in the case of Stoppard, we sense that the author is afraid of writing a straightforward comedy without intellectual gimmickry, lest it be considered old-hat. And the big question is: Are these authors right? Are we indeed too jaded for straight comedies; or would we get a legitimate feeling of *déjà vu* from them, no matter how witty, adroit, and accurately observed or imagined they might be? Could it be that however much we may deplore the excessive cleverness, the elucubrated stratagems, the seemingly sterile or piddling technical innovations, without them we would like these plays even less, or not at all? I do not think this is so—at least not in all cases. But there is no easy, obvious answer to such dubieties, and even critics who do not believe in innovation for mere innovation's sake will have to start asking themselves some hard questions.

Such questions apply also to *Kennedy's Children* by Robert Patrick. This is a play by a young American who has been uncommonly prolific off- and off-off-Broadway, where this play, too, was first presented and barely noticed. It then journeyed to a small London theater club, where it unexpectedly became a roaring success, was transferred, equally successfully, to the West End, there hailed by the itinerant rhapsode of drama criticism, Clive Barnes, and, on the strength of all that, brought back to New York as Robert Patrick's first play to reach Broadway. Let me state right off that the handful of Patrick's other countless, usually short, works I have seen or read have struck me as slapped-together trivia, generally of a campy, homosexual nature, often virtually pointless—the outpourings of someone with a compulsion to write but nothing much to say. *Kennedy's Children* is a little better than that, but it is not, for all its glowing notices this time around, anything I would consider a play.

It takes place in a bar (actually Phebe's) on the Bowery, where five

unhappy people drink away a rainy afternoon and evening. There is also a bartender who wordlessly serves drinks, and ends the play by turning on a blaring jukebox. The five characters take turns delivering fragments of five long monologues; they never speak to, or even take note of, one another; indeed, their speaking, though sometimes seemingly directed to the audience or an invisible interlocutor, may not be speech at all, only the representation of their thoughts. Patrick has simply externalized the interior monologue and been inconsistent even about that. In a way, it resembles Ayckbourn's *How the Other Half Loves*, with people from different places spirited into the same locale where they exist past one another. The obvious difficulty with this is that it sets the dramatic clock back, not just to Friday afternoon, like *The Norman Conquests*, but almost 2500 years, to the first plays of Aeschylus. In the intervening centuries, rightly or wrongly, we have grown used to the notion that plays are not about single speakers speechifying alternately, but about dialogue, interaction, visualized conflict and resolution, and this despite some of our recent avant-gardists who have done their level best to disabuse us of such vulgar misconceptions. For me, at any rate, it is totally perverse to put five or six characters in a situation where, both dramatically and existentially, they have to make some kind of contact, and then refuse to let this happen.

And it is not only perverse; it is also—which may be more to the point—lazy. For it is much easier to write mildly interesting biographical or autobiographical soliloquies of inordinate length, chop them up, and shuffle the pieces more or less symmetrically, then to make five people come alive through responding to one another without benefit of lengthy rehearsal of their life stories. Indeed, one of the characters, Mark, a battle-crazed Vietnam veteran, comes from an earlier Patrick one-acter, from which he was hoisted into *Kennedy's Children*; the others might just as well have a similar provenance. Yet I do not even have the impression of watching five superimposed one-acters; only of getting five sets of exposition in search of a play.

Mark's story is that of a good middle-American boy who went into the war with typical silent-American attitudes, then proceeded to make a hero of Chick, his vaguely literary buddy. The absurdities of the war drive them to drugs, Mark goes berserk and, after various hallucinations, kills his best friend. Since it looks as if the enemy had killed Chick, Mark, though now a certifiable psychopath, is discharged, and is in New York on his way home. There, his mother, who is the cause of much of his derangement, awaits him, and his return is likely to end in carnage. Wanda, the next monologist, worked at a lowly job in an advertising agency; what changed her life was the assassination of John F. Kennedy, whom she idolized. Her entire story is a rumination about the "lost leader" and his wife, about what he meant and continues to mean to this white-collar worker. She tells of those days of televised mourning and murder, and of how she feels about it now, which has induced her to start working with retarded children and trying to teach them about J.F.K., in the hope of keeping what she considers his crusade alive. Sparger, the third soliloquist, is most

nearly the author's alter ego, as a glance at Patrick's *curriculum vitae* makes clear. He is an off-off-Broadway actor (one wonders a bit at his sartorial affluence), a homosexual who, after traumatic transvestite misadventures, finds an artistic and spiritual home at the Opera Buffo, run by an eccentric quasi-artist called Buffo. (For these read Caffè Cino, and its owner, the late Joe Cino.) The obscure dive developed into the most prestigious—because outrageous yet dedicated—café-theater in town, and here Sparger became an actor, dancer, all-around man of the theater. But success meant the co-opting of the Opera Buffo by the uptown crowd, which led to the tragic demise of both the place and its owner. Now Sparger acts in theaters like El Dada (*i.e.*, La Mama), drinks and cruises a lot, and is cynically witty about art, life, everything. Typically, he will accost a couple of contented homosexuals with a remark like, "I always wanted to have sex between two consenting adults."

Next we have Rona, a disenchanted former flower child. She and her "old man," Robbie, have been through all of it together—a hippie's-eye catalogue of the sixties: the marches, sit-ins, demonstrations, Zen, Mao, drug consumption and pushing, free stores, rock music, being "married" by Timothy Leary at Harvard, Greenwich Village, San Francisco, the political assassinations, and all the rest—rather more than could have been experienced by a mere pair of flower children; enough, in fact, for a whole bouquet. Finally "the movement" became ugly and violent from political disenchantment and infiltration by "these sort of insincere kids, I mean, they were television addicts, they were middle-class kids, they were just after fun and dope and sex and funny clothes, or Astrology and the I Ching—it was just a vacation for the lot of them . . ." So now Robbie has become addicted to the hard stuff and has opted out of everything, replying from his corner: "Sure, let's fight for peace . . . I'm all for freedom . . . Where do you want me to start? Who do you want me to kill? . . ." Rona now hangs out in bars, gets drunk, and goes home as like as not "with some black boy. I don't want you to misunderstand that, I don't think black boys are sexier than white men or anything like that, but there are so few straight white boys any more and they mostly can take their pick of the younger girls—I'm twenty-nine."

Lastly, there is Carla, the dizzy blonde, whose heroine was Marilyn Monroe, upon whose suicide Carla determined to replace her. But she never got beyond becoming a gogo girl, semiprofessional hooker, and the closest she came to real show business was bedding down with an agent. So she decided that "they didn't want any more movie stars, no more crazy actresses to demand huge salaries . . . because all the audiences wanted was just one supergirl after another, that the mini-skirt mattered more than the girl, that James Bond didn't care who he fucked, because they were all alike—and I guess if they felt like that towards them, then they all were." In her next speech, she adds: "I guess James Bond really didn't care, because at about this time all the men I knew turned gay, or were revealed to have been gay all the time, or maybe they just came out. It was certainly better than sleeping with Raquel Welch and cutting

yourself on her . . .” In what may be the most meretricious move of the play, we learn that Carla took an overdose of barbiturates as she left home, and is now literally drinking herself to death.

I have quoted at some length from the play to show that Patrick has an ear for people’s speech, and some sense of character—although Carla, for instance, sometimes sounds rather like a more cultivated person’s commentary on her. But the quotations should also show that there is confusion here. Patrick generally does not make clear whether he is making fun of his characters or, as he claims in his preface, mourning for them as tragic victims. His theme is, clearly, the passing of the sixties, or, as he writes in that preface, “the death of the idea of heroes as guides for our lives.” What does that mean? Could these figures really be heroes and guides? All right, Kennedy; or at least the image he projected. But what sort of heroic exemplars are Marilyn Monroe, Joe Cino (or Buffo), Timothy Leary, Chick, and the rest? And is hero worship, in any case, a desirable thing, whose loss is worth lamenting? Obviously, one could argue on both sides of these questions—but that is just what *Kennedy’s Children* fails to do. And not only is there no dialectic, there is no clear single position either, possibly because Patrick doesn’t know what he thinks. To give an example: does Carla have solid grounds for her belief that stars are out and men turning homosexual in droves, so that neither as sex goddess nor as sex object is there any future for her? Or is this sour grapes—merely her neurosis talking? It sounds like rationalization to us, but the author implies total sympathy for her position, confirming it through what Rona says (“there are so few straight white boys any more”), through Sparger’s and Mark’s obvious lack of interest in women, and through the way he makes us laugh wryly with Carla rather than at her. Is Patrick aware that after another suicide or two, or just another decade or two, *our* stars will look just as glamorous to the nostalgia of the future as yesterday’s stars look to the nostalgia of our time? To the pervasive camp sensibility, obsolescence is the very essence of divinity. Patrick’s deludedness does not, of course, make Carla’s case less sad, but it sentimentalizes and obfuscates what needs to be understood and assessed—which would probably make it more, rather than less, tragic.

There is plentiful evidence of confusion in Patrick’s mind. Thus in the prefatory note he says that he refused permission for numerous productions of the play in which the directors proposed to use “trampolines, trapezes, and slides and films in a way that seemed to me likely to bury the play. However, as with all plays, the *right* use of trampolines, trapezes and stereoscopic Cinerama would be right.” This is nonsense: if trapezes and trampolines do not belong in the play, there is no way of sticking them in in the right way—and in what play, except maybe *Jumpers*, do they belong? Would it be more appropriate to mourn Marilyn Monroe on a trampoline or on a trapeze? But Patrick can even top this: “Kennedy’s children . . . have so very much to offer one another and are held away from one another by fear and despair. I sincerely hope that within a very short time the world will be in such a state of bliss that

the sorrows and stagnations of the characters in the play will be incomprehensible. In the meantime, the play stands as my tribute to their valor and suffering." What possible use could these self-absorbed wrecks be to one another, what succor could they offer? And is it really fear and despair that keeps them apart, or isn't it rather an ultimate selfishness or emptiness or weakness, terrible and heart-breaking if you like, but not *all* imposed on them by some universal fear and despair. And can anyone but a holy (or unholy) fool "sincerely hope" that the world is on the threshold of Utopian bliss that will make human "sorrows and stagnations" incomprehensible? And what kind of a play is it that cannot make itself understood, no matter what the social changes, after "a very short time"? Everything that could possibly change has changed since the time of Euripides, but have that master's plays become incomprehensible? As a playwright, Robert Patrick shows signs of a good ear and a lively tongue, but he must yet develop a brain to put in back of them.

I have said nothing about any of the productions because, this time round, I wanted the plays, such as they are, to be the thing. I wanted to illustrate certain strategies that, to me, appear fairly desperate, and ask you to join me in speculating about whether the drama is showing signs of irrevocable old age, or whether the dramatists are merely giving evidence of unnecessary immaturity.

Notes on Contributors

JAN SCHREIBER* is a poet who lives in Brookline, Massachusetts and does research at Harvard and MIT. He has recently completed a new collection of poems, "Therefore We Damned." Along with five other writers he is in the process of starting a new literary magazine, *Canto*.

DOROTHY ROBERTS' *New and Selected Poems* will be published later in 1976.

GUY DAVENPORT teaches at the University of Kentucky. His latest book is *Tatlin!*, a collection of stories.

DAVE SMITH* is a native of tidewater Virginia, has published a collection of poems, *The Fisherman's Whore*, and will include these poems in a new collection, *Cumberland Station*, to be published by the University of Illinois Press in September, 1976.

JAMES BAKER HALL lives in Lexington, Kentucky where he is working on a novel.

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS is a former Advisory Editor of this Review.

KATHLEEN SPIVACK's* most recent volume of poetry is *The Jane Poems* (Doubleday, 1974). She was a Discovery Winner at the Poetry Center, YM-YWHA, in New York in 1973.

ANNE S. PERLMAN's poems appear in various magazines and journals. Formerly a newspaper reporter in Paris, and in San Francisco where she now lives, she is the poetry reviewer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

PETER H. LEE is a Professor of Korean and Comparative Literature at the University of Hawaii. Currently a Guggenheim fellow, his latest publications include *Songs of Flying Dragons: A Critical Reading* (Harvard University Press, 1975).

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

SCOTT JOPLIN'S OPERA *Treemonisha* is no longer news: its New York run last fall (it closed December 14) had been preceded in 1974 by productions at Morehouse College in Atlanta and at Wolf Trap Music Center outside Washington, D.C., and in May 1975 by Frank Corsaro's staging—transplanted virtually intact to Broadway—for the Houston Opera. Neither is the work of much significance musically or historically: the score is weak in inspiration and execution, and in the context of the King of Ragtime's total achievement and his influence upon his contemporaries and successors it is almost negligible. But its composition is a curious and affecting chapter in Joplin's career. And that it should have been written at all sheds light on the nature of America's musical past.

I have said that the score is weak, and that is more than one man's judgment: it is the consensus of the musically knowledgeable who know it, and an opinion endorsed by practically everyone in my acquaintance of less sophisticated taste who heard it in New York. Furthermore, the work was not well served by the production. Corsaro, whose innovating efforts at the New York City Opera have brought him praise and notoriety, as well as shrugs of indifference from those who distrust the assumption that old Dame Opera can't make it these days without a heavy application of cosmetics, retreated to Shubert-Alley stagecraft in an apparent attempt to render Joplin's piece palatable to Broadway habitués. All the mugging, stylized gesturing, and stagy movement appeared at last more ends in themselves than convincing depiction, and likewise the almost embarrassing—and almost incessant—dancing devised by Louis Johnson and executed by his Dance Theatre. Franco Colavecchia's sets, "suggested by the collage-paintings of black artist Romare Bearden" (according to Shirley Fleming of *Musical America*), were colorful and professional but unmemorable. The production as a whole was lively and diverting, but had a distressing flavor of *Raisin* about it.

Perhaps a really compelling performance or two could have rescued the evening from boredom, but there were none. Carmen Balthrop, the soprano who sang the title role, was last year's winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Auditions, and her voice was reason enough for the judges' decision, but at this juncture she does not possess sufficient presence and imaginative projection to breathe life into even this rather rudimentary character. The old pro Betty Allen, as *Treemonisha*'s foster mother, is probably incapable of an unsatisfactory performance, but her voice is uneven now, and her mind seemed elsewhere much of the time. The rest of the cast (I did not hear Willard White, who was highly praised as Ned, *Treemonisha*'s foster father) were adequate but seldom more.

A central factor in *Treemonisha*'s failure to convince is the perfunctory

book, a folk tale fashioned by Joplin himself with a didactic purpose. The scene is a plantation near Texarkana, Arkansas, and the time 1884 (Joplin himself was born in Texarkana in 1868, and as a boy obtained access to a piano in the home of a white employer of his mother). The whites have abandoned the plantation, and the few black families who live on it, and in the surrounding forest, are prey to superstition and to the wiles of the conjurers—the “goofer-dust men”—Zodzetrick, Luddud, and Simon. Treemonisha, a foundling, is educated; Ned and Monisha, her foster parents, had exchanged housework for the girl’s lessons in the home of a local white family. Rebuffed by Treemonisha, the conjurers decide her education is a threat to their power and kidnap her. She is rescued by her friend Remus, who disguises himself as the devil to rout the conjurers. Treemonisha returns to the settlement amid general rejoicing, and asks that the conjurers not be punished but forgiven instead. The people reluctantly agree; then they acknowledge Treemonisha’s superiority and plead with her to become their leader and shield them from the consequences of their own ignorance. Reassured by the men that they will accede to the leadership of a woman, she accepts.

Inflated claims have been made for this slender story, as for just about every aspect of the opera. One source of such claims is, quite naturally, Vera Brodsky Lawrence, artistic consultant for the Houston-Broadway production and a musical scholar whose Joplin edition¹ deserves much of the credit for restoring the ragtime marvels of Joplin and his coevals to favor in our time. “Ahead of his time in more ways than one,” Ms. Lawrence writes in the program, “Joplin dipped into . . . a visionary concept—women’s liberation—by allowing his young heroine, because she had an education, to become the leader of her people.” What defense can we make against such trendiness? The shallowness of the assertion (and the ambiguous phrase “dipped into”) seems to protect it against refutation. But Ms. Lawrence offers no evidence that Joplin, or anyone in his ken during the decade—from 1907, perhaps, until his death in 1917—that he worked on *Treemonisha*, regarded women in terms that even tenuously suggest the theoretical basis of our contemporary fuss. And, given leave by Ms. Lawrence’s indulgence to engage in my own amateur sociologizing, I will add that, to some, the elevation of Treemonisha hints not so much at women’s liberation as at the tradition of domestic matriarchy that has haunted American black culture from Joplin’s time to our own.

Finally, and fatally, the music is unconvincing, in spite of several lovely and expert passages. The peculiar curse upon America’s minor musical masters—from the early years of the nineteenth century until the ideas of Ives, Ruggles, Varèse and Copland took hold—has been that they should disdain what came fluently and naturally to them and aspire to compose something nobler, better, and more lasting—something after European models, that is. Joplin and *Treemonisha* were victims of such aspirations.

¹ *The Collected Works of Scott Joplin* (facsimile of original editions). Volume I: Works for Piano; Volume II: Works for Voice (Songs and *Treemonisha*). The New York Public Library, New York (1971).

Joplin's early musical training, at the hands of his family and an old German music teacher, never earned him a certificate but seems to have been thorough. His finishing schools were the saloons and sporting houses in the Midwestern and Mississippi river-town tenderloins, where he played the piano for a living from 1885 to 1893, and other musical odd jobs: second cornet in the Sedalia (Mo.) Queen City Concert Band and composer-arranger for his own touring vocal group. Very early in his career he seems to have entertained the ambition to lift ragtime to musical respectability, to earn it the right to rest beside volumes of "serious" compositions on the parlor piano music stand. In 1896 he settled for a time in Sedalia and studied music at George Smith College, a school for blacks supported by the Methodist Church. As Joshua Rifkin puts it in the liner notes for his excellent recording of Joplin's "Piano Rags,"² "[Joplin] worked at translating the elusive rhythms of ragtime into musical notation and continued to refine his creative imagination." In the last years of the century, he took a job playing the piano in Will and Walker Williams's Maple Leaf Club in Sedalia, and there wrote the work that bears the club's name, his first composed rag and perhaps still his best known. An itinerant music dealer and publisher, a white man named John Stark, bought *The Maple Leaf Rag* and published it in 1899. Buoyed on the tide of a growing interest in ragtime, the piece sold hundreds of thousands of copies within a few years and left both Joplin and Stark comfortable financially.

The success of *The Maple Leaf Rag* provided Joplin with the opportunity to try to realize his musical aims. He moved to St. Louis—Stark had preceded him and set up a publishing business—and devoted himself to teaching and composing. Thereafter his ragtime compositions became subtler and more complex: the 2/4 time signature, the *tempo di marcia*, the striding, steady bass and the syncopated treble remained the defining characteristics, but countermelodic motifs were introduced, the harmonic patterns became less rigid and the bass line less repetitious, and the form (in thematic outline ABACD) was often better balanced through the reappearance of the first theme at the close and through a careful tonal progression from one theme to another. Interested readers will find the Rifkin recording mentioned above a casebook: *Maple Leaf* is included, and the *Gladiolus Rag* of 1907, *Euphonic Sounds* of 1909, *Scott Joplin's New Rag* of 1912, and the *Magnetic Rag* of 1914 provide a fascinating study of the composer's development from mid-career to the end. Like the lieder of Schubert and the mazurkas of Chopin, these works represent the rudiments of folk art transmuted by genius into fine art. Joplin would have been pleased by such an estimate. In 1908 Stark published *The School of Ragtime—Six Exercises for Piano*, a pedagogical work in which Joplin put his own compositions above the run of the mill:

That all publications masquerading under the name of ragtime are not the genuine article will be better known when these exercises are

² Nonesuch H-71248. The recording's phenomenal commercial success in 1970 was, like Ms. Lawrence's volumes, a prime factor in the current ragtime revival.

studied. That real ragtime of the higher class is rather difficult to play is a painful truth which most pianists have discovered. Syncopations are no indication of light or trashy music, and to shy bricks at 'hateful ragtime' no longer passes for musical culture.

Yet apparently he never persuaded himself that these last assertions were true, for during the early years of the century he had essayed more ambitious works: *Rag Time Dance*, a folk ballet, was completed in 1902, and not long afterward *A Guest of Honor*, a ragtime opera. And as he wrote the preface to *The School of Ragtime*, he was already at work on *Treemonisha*, in which he hoped to transcend ragtime. It was to consume just about all of his remaining active life. After separating from his first wife (he remarried three years later), he followed Stark once more, this time to New York, and tried to persuade him to publish *Treemonisha*, but ragtime's declining popularity had brought Stark's fortunes low and he refused. Joplin published the vocal score himself in 1911, and then began work on orchestration and a search for backers to make a production possible. In desperation he finally arranged to have the opera sung, without scenery or orchestral accompaniment, for a Harlem audience in 1915. It made no effect, and Joplin's confidence was shattered. He was suffering from syphilis, and the disease took an increasing toll on his career and his demeanor. After several months' confinement in Manhattan State Hospital, he died there in April of 1917.

Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis, whose book *They All Played Ragtime*³ is the chief source for the history of the period and its music, are surely correct to remark of the Harlem viewers of *Treemonisha* that they "were sophisticated enough to reject their folk past, but not sufficiently to relish a return to it in art." But this stricture cannot entirely explain their reaction to the score, for there is very little ragtime coloring to it, and there are only two rag numbers, the rousing air "Aunt Dinah Has Blowed de Horn" that closes the first act and the concluding "Real Slow Drag," the show's best moment. The rest, with its one-syllable-per-note word setting, its simple harmonic schemes, and its square phrases, is music in search of a style. It should not be surprising (though I confess I found it so at first) that *Treemonisha*'s music often calls to mind Victor Herbert, one of the most popular and widely heard composers of Joplin's time, without approaching the grace and vitality of Herbert's best. For, reaching beyond the area of his mastery, the King of Ragtime Composers was able to impart little of his own to the alien form and unconsciously found help where he could, near at hand.

Now that *Treemonisha* has been dusted off and presented for our inspection in a professional production, we can put it back on the shelf of aberrations occasioned by America's cultural inferiority complex—now happily a thing of the past—and turn back with delight to Joplin's vivacious, captivating, moving and thrilling rags.

³ Oak Publications (New York, 1971); originally published (1950) by Alfred A. Knopf.

STEPHEN FARBER

Americana, Sweet and Sour

KEN KESEY's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, published in 1962, has taken a long time to reach the screen. This delay will probably help the film at the box office. By now Kesey's celebration of the heroic, free-thinking maverick battling a repressive authoritarian system—a battle set in a mental hospital, but clearly meant to symbolize a more universal social conflict—is a pop cliché. A huge audience is ready to applaud Kesey's neat, predictable allegory about an asylum where the keepers are crazier than the inmates.

Directed by Milos Forman, and featuring a striking cast of largely unfamiliar faces, the movie version of *Cuckoo's Nest* is astonishingly well-made. Kesey's ideas may be facile, but his strong, straightforward narrative translates beautifully to the screen. The steadily escalating conflict between McMurphy and the deadly Nurse Ratched generates acute dramatic tension, and the confined setting gives the movie a claustrophobic intensity. Forman has capitalized on the novel's strengths and minimized its weaknesses. The inmates are not one-dimensional symbols of freedom of misunderstood misfits; they are maddening, contradictory, elusive *characters*, and all of the roles are brilliantly cast and performed.

Forman and his writers, Lawrence Hauben and Bo Goldman, have even tried to introduce some complexities into the central characterizations. McMurphy is not such a roaring, defiant rebel hero as he was in the book. Jack Nicholson is more restrained than usual, and he brings off several quiet, reflective moments that provide an effective counterpoint to the scenes of exuberance and rage. Instead of making Nurse Ratched a monster, Forman has made her a prototype of the soft-spoken, sweetly reasonable institutional bureaucrat: Louise Fletcher plays her with a lilting, musical voice, a baby-faced smile, and a will of steel.

While underplaying the melodrama, Forman respects the elemental tensions of the story. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* reworks enduring American myths about freedom and nonconformity that still carry an emotional charge. In Kesey's variation on the classic American fable, McMurphy is the life-force, the outsider who won't play by society's rules. He is, in effect, the Western gunfighter in the cuckoo's nest; Chief Bromden, the Indian who narrates the novel, describes him as "the cowboy out of the TV set walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare." The other patients in the ward are willing victims, men who have already surrendered to the system—like the cowardly townspeople in *High Noon*. The story is about how McMurphy revives them by renewing their belief in freedom; he inspires them, but destroys himself in the process.

In the hands of a macho American director, *Cuckoo's Nest* might have been insufferable, full of bellowing and brawling, hysteria and self-pity.

Forman, a Czech emigré, gives the story the detached, ironic note that it needs; he doesn't push or underline anything. Because of the mastery of Forman's direction, and because of the power of the myths it enshrines, the movie takes fire. But the American legends exalted in *Cuckoo's Nest* can no longer be taken at face value, and Forman does not succeed in glossing over all the troubling implications of Kesey's fable. The movie provides a rousing emotional experience, and for most viewers that may be enough; they won't mind the oversimplifications and distortions in this epic of Americana.

Like many American writers, Kesey is obsessed with the idea of freedom and suspicious of all social organization; as an alternative to repressive social authority, he can only imagine an idyllic life in nature. At the very end, when Chief Bromden crashes through the window of the asylum, the last shot is of him running toward the mountains. It is impossible to imagine where he might go; Kesey fails to suggest what kind of society he might function in, and we may respond to the beauty of this final image without fully assenting in the fantasy of absolute solitude that is implicit. This ending, with its echoes of Huckleberry Finn lighting out for "the territory," underscores Kesey's inability to recognize the possibility of any kind of meaningful life in society; he cannot conceive of a mature and enlightened human community. In Kesey's view civilization is simply repressive, destructive, evil, and although there is something appealingly romantic in this radical rejection of the very fabric of society, there is also something childish in the urge to flee all convention and discipline. Kesey contemplates a world without regulations; but that is another way of saying that he is terrified of *adult* life, and eager to retreat to a pristine state of nature which does not exist outside a boy's lazy summer daydream.

The fantasy is exclusively a *boy's* fantasy. In Kesey's fable, as in the stories of many other American writers, society is ruled by women, and freedom can only be found in an escape from the feminine influence. In the classic Westerns from which *Cuckoo's Nest* derives, the woman is the one who brings civilization to the frontier, and this is always seen as an ambiguous victory; Westerns are haunted by the fear that women want to control and stifle men's yearning to be free.

Kesey's view cannot, however, be described as ambivalent; *Cuckoo's Nest* is infused with a suspicion, horror, and hatred of women. The mental ward is a matriarchy; although the doctors pretend to be in command, it is Nurse Ratched—the Big Nurse—who rules the roost. McMurphy describes her as "a bitch and a buzzard and a ball-cutter," and in Kesey's opinion she is not exactly unrepresentative of her sex.

In the film Kesey's misogyny has been toned down but not eliminated. Although Nurse Ratched may not be the gorgon of the novel, she is still devious, ice cold, and deadly beneath her peaches and cream exterior. Everyone has probably come into contact with a bureaucrat like Nurse Ratched—a stubborn robot who cannot be shaken out of her slavish devotion to meaningless routines. But in the film, as in the novel, we never feel her enjoyment of the power she has secured; she is completely without

passion. The rigidity of Kesey's concept makes her an abstraction of evil, without any of the human eccentricities that a truly dangerous tyrant has. It seems depressing that in a film setting out to attack dehumanization, the character of the Nurse is so completely dehumanized. The filmmakers' inability to envision—even for an instant—what the world might look like from the Nurse's point of view represents a significant failure of imagination.

Most of the men in the asylum have been driven there by women. McMurphy was initially sent to prison because of his statutory rape of a girl "15 going on 35," a crafty little slut who set him up for the slaughter. Billy Bibbit (affectingly played by Brad Dourif) commits suicide because Nurse Ratched threatens to tell his neurotically repressed mother about his first sexual experience. Whenever a writer is unable to come up with motivation for a character, he can always place the blame on Mom. Billy's suicide is the one scene in the film where the melodramatic wheels really creak, where Forman seems to have been most seriously hamstrung by the primitive sexual attitudes of the novel. The only sympathetic women in the film are the two whores whom McMurphy sneaks into the asylum. In Kesey's adolescent fantasy the only women who can be accepted as equals are the whores with pea brains and hearts of gold. Any intelligent woman is the enemy. This division of women into two simple categories—castrating bitch and lovable whore—exposes the virulence of Kesey's comic-book mythology.

In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler pointed out that this suspicion of women runs all through American literature, and he called attention to the idealization of male friendship in our fiction. The real love affair in *Cuckoo's Nest* is that of McMurphy and Chief Bromden. McMurphy befriends the Chief and brings him back to life. Will Sampson's magnificent performance gives the Chief dignity and heroic stature, but his performance cannot entirely redeem the sentimentality of this central relationship. At the end McMurphy and the Chief are planning to run off to Canada together, but when the Chief discovers that McMurphy has been lobotomized, he cradles his friend in his arms before smothering him; this love-death scene is charged with an almost overtly sexual passion. The relationship of McMurphy and the Chief recalls that of Ishmael and Queequeg, or Huck and Nigger Jim; it revives a familiar American fantasy. Fiedler called *Cuckoo's Nest* "the old, old fable of the White outcast and noble Red Man joined together against home and mother, against the female world of civilization."

In 1962, when the novel was published, many readers were blissfully ignorant of the sexual prejudices that Kesey reinforced. But in the last decade, we have lost our innocence. Kesey's belligerent machismo no longer seems so charming; we are more aware of the contempt for women that underlies this all-male idyll. The slippery thing about *Cuckoo's Nest* is that the profound and admirable values that it champions are inseparable from the insidious sexual prejudices that it perpetuates. Maybe once we are away from the spell of Forman's impressive, electrifying film, we can

detach ourselves in order to question the underpinnings of this dubious American fable.

Although it is already dated, the social protest of *Cuckoo's Nest* sets it apart from other current American films. Hollywood is in an aggressively escapist mood, but several recent comedies of Americana have managed to smuggle a little social criticism in between the gags. These films express disillusionment with the American myths presented more solemnly in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Howard Zieff's highly-praised comedy *Hearts of the West* (from an original screenplay by Rob Thompson) is a lighthearted speculation on the death of our frontier ideals. Lewis Tator, an Iowa farmboy in the thirties, dreams of being a Western writer like Zane Grey, and he believes that the romantic, melodramatic West of Gray's stories still exists beyond the Rockies. When he arrives in Nevada, Lewis finds that the correspondence school he has enrolled in is a fraud. He makes his way to Hollywood, where he sees all his fantasies acted out by a group of jaded B-movie actors. The low-budget Westerns being shot in Death Valley are the last repository for the myths that have stimulated Lewis's imagination. He throws himself into the movies with the same naive enthusiasm that he brings to his trash novels, but the ideals of the Old West prove to be irrelevant to the cutthroat atmosphere of Hollywood.

It is a wonderful premise for a comedy, and most of the critics have taken *Hearts of the West* at face value, ignoring the gap between intention and achievement. Although there are some nice touches in Howard Zieff's direction, and very resourceful performances by Jeff Bridges, Andy Griffith, Alan Arkin, and Blythe Danner, the film is an erratic, disappointingly blunt satire. Thompson and Zieff seem unable to distinguish provocative from leaden ideas. The central plot, which involves the pursuit of Lewis by the con men who run the correspondence school, belongs in an Abbott and Costello comedy. There are long, unfunny digressions dealing with a publisher of pulp fiction and his brother-in-law, a producer of B-musicals. The most successful scenes are the ones dealing with the manufacture of the shoestring Westerns of Gower Gulch. But the most promising themes and characters are undeveloped. For example, the role of the script-girl Trout might have been a prototype of the tough, independent career woman who managed to find a home in Hollywood; but Blythe Danner, one of our best young actresses, has to struggle to build a character out of a few pallid fragments of scenes. Similarly, the Western director Kessler is a potentially rich creation—a transplanted New York Jew who still talks Yiddish to his producer and begs his actors and stunt men to give him a few authentic cowboy yelps over the campfire. Unfortunately, we learn almost nothing about his background, his dreams, drives, and ambitions, and so the tension between his European-Jewish heritage and his homespun frontier fantasies is unexplored.

Most damagingly, the character of Pike, the cynical Western writer turned stunt man, is undefined. Since his betrayal of Lewis is the dramatic center of the film, the hollowness of his characterization fatally weakens

the climax. The film is built around a series of disillusionments—from Lewis's discovery of the phony correspondence school through his recognition that his surrogate father Pike has violated his trust and stolen his novel. But at the end there is a reconciliation between the two friends. Pike bursts in to save Lewis's life, and as Lewis is taken to the hospital, with his girl in his arms, the Western novel of his dreams comes to a triumphantly happy conclusion. Obviously this ending is meant as fantasy, but even in those terms it is unacceptable because it is so completely at odds with the theme of the film. Pike's eleventh-hour conversion is the rankest movie hokum, and the filmmakers don't even try to motivate his transformation; there is a feeling of desperation in this last-minute reconciliation that testifies to a failure of courage and conviction. The ending might have been poignant if Zieff had suggested that Lewis clung to his pulp fantasies in spite of his disillusionment. Instead his fantasies are vindicated; Zieff is frightened to take the story to its logical conclusion.

This cotton candy ending is characteristic of evasions that run throughout the film. Zieff is very indulgent toward his hero's fantasies, and this sweetness is initially appealing; in one of the most charming scenes Lewis crawls out of his boarding house window to embrace a palm tree on his first morning in California. The problem with the film is that it doesn't have enough contrast or enough edge; the benignly tolerant view of human folly turns the film numbingly bland. The script is finally too thin; there aren't enough biting, vivid, surprising details. Zieff's affection for his characters cannot make up for his failures of perception.

It may simply be that I am temperamentally more receptive to more acerbic comedy, but I prefer Frank Perry's sardonic anti-Western, *Rancho Deluxe*, from a witty and inventive screenplay by novelist Thomas McGuane. Like *Hearts of the West*, *Rancho Deluxe* concerns people trying but failing to live up to the myths of the West. It is a contemporary Western, set in Montana, and the exquisite unpolluted landscapes are tantalizing reminders of the old Western ideals of freedom and adventure; the beauty of the countryside seduces the characters into believing that the romance of the frontier can be reclaimed. The land hasn't changed, but everything else has, and the characters are lost in irrelevant dreams.

The opening scene establishes the slightly askew quality of today's West. Two modern-day cattle rustlers shoot down a cow and slice it up with an electric saw. The heroes see themselves as figures out of Western mythology; Jack is playing the devil-may-care Western outlaw, while his partner Cecil acts the role of the silent, misunderstood half-breed. We soon learn that Jack is actually the son of a very wealthy, aristocratic family (the bored rich boy playing dangerous games is a typical McGuane hero); Cecil is a sweet, not-very-bright urbanized Indian trying to project a gloomy romantic dignity that he cannot quite master. The subsidiary characters are also trying to escape what they really are by playing cowboy. Mr. and Mrs. Brown owned a beauty parlor in Schenectady before they decided to try their hand at ranching. One of their ranch hands, Curt, formerly modeled hot combs on television. The detective hired by

the Browns to find the rustlers, an old man named Beige who plays his folksy Gabby Hayes role to the hilt, is in truth a cunning shyster, and his "niece"—a well-scrubbed, all-American girl who breaks into song at the dinner table—is a tarty minx who helps him solve his cases by seducing any gullible men in the vicinity.

If all of these people are pretending to be something they are not, that may be because the world they inhabit is so disorienting. Some striking images capture the incongruous juxtaposition of old West and new: A group of riders on horseback, dressed in ponchos like a nineteenth century posse, approach a bullet-riddled Lincoln Continental abandoned on the range; one of the ranch hands vacuums several Navajo rugs spread out on the grass in a breathtaking open field. Other images—a bull stolen from rancher Brown demolishing a motel room—are even more absurdist. Everything we see tells the same story: the old Western myths have eroded. In one sly scene a teenage girl who is out with young Jack wears him out with her voracious sexual appetite—a neat reversal of the sexual roles ordained by Westerns. The characters have lost their confidence, but they cling to their fantasies about America. At the end Jack and Cecil finally make it to "Rancho Deluxe"—the cattle rustler's utopia, a glorious natural wonderland. As they ride off into the sunset, they pass the sign identifying the Montana Department of Corrections. The West of their dreams is—quite literally—a prison.

Rancho Deluxe is an unusually intelligent comedy, knowing and hard-edged, with just a faint trace of nostalgia for the vanished, legendary West. One can wish that Frank Perry's direction were more responsive to the script or simply more animated; too many scenes are permitted to die on the screen. But the movie has been beautifully photographed by William Fraker, and Perry has drawn excellent performances from his cast. McGuane's writing is the main attraction. His dialogue is pungent, and he creates a whole gallery of eccentric, unpredictable, resonant characters. In my favorite scene detective Beige, marvelously played by Slim Pickens, is roused from a nap for a consultation with rancher Brown, and he grumbles at being awakened from a particularly tantalizing dream set in ancient Egypt; he cuts short the meeting because he wants to get back to sleep to find out if he was a commoner or a Pharaoh. That is only one example of the fresh, witty observation that enriches *Rancho Deluxe*, an appealing revisionist Western.

Jerry Belson's script for *Smile*—a tart comedy about a teenage beauty contest in Santa Rosa, California—is not quite in the same league. Belson, who is a television writer, tends to underline his satiric points; his characters rarely have the secret quirks of McGuane's more full-blooded people. But thanks to Belson's inventiveness, and the superb control of Michael Ritchie's direction, *Smile* turns out to be one of the best American films of the year. It casts a cold eye on some durable American values and ideals—the competition, clannishness, insularity, and optimism enshrined in the heartland. Predictably, the film has been attacked as smug and condescending, and it is true that there are some cheap jokes—for ex-

ample, when Big Bob, a used car dealer and presiding judge of the Young American Miss pageant, promises his wife a vacation in Disneyland. For the most part, however, Ritchie—the talented director of *Downhill Racer* and *The Candidate*—resists overstatement. While Ritchie could never be called a warm-hearted humanistic director, he isn't vicious or contemptuous either. He clearly enjoys the absurdity of the beauty pageant rituals; there is a good-humored, unpretentious spirit to the satire that saves it from turning ugly.

Without straining for significance, Ritchie and Belson paint a fairly comprehensive picture of false American values. Critics who have complained that beauty contests are too easy a target have missed the real thrust of Ritchie's satire. *Smile* places the beauty pageant in a larger social context by connecting the contest to the obsessions of the adult characters. The most savage barbs are not directed at the girls in the pageant, but at the aging fraternity boys and middle-aged cheerleaders who organize the competition. The pageant flourishes in a town overrun by clubs and contests and secret societies; the smiling judges, the growling Bears, the boisterous Jaycees, the officious bureaucrats, and the failed showbiz entrepreneurs exploit the contestants to gratify their own fantasies.

The film's most penetrating observation is of the deep-rooted childishness of American life. Rather than celebrating this childishness, like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Smile* roasts the infantile compulsions of the adults in Santa Rosa. Brenda, the perpetually smiling den mother who trains the girls, is a former Young American Miss, still dreaming of past glory. The men in town are equally regressive. A key sequence in the film is the exhausted rooster ceremony held to torment Jaycees who turn 35, a reminder of a horrific fraternity initiation rite. In this comic nightmare, the men frolic in white sheets, humiliate each other, and finally line up to kiss a dead chicken's anus; they cavort like a troop of nine-year-old Cub Scouts.

This scene is an example of Ritchie's control. It might have been grotesquely overwrought, but the tone is cool and wry. With a few carefully-chosen, properly outrageous images, Ritchie captures the childishness, boorishness, and latent homosexuality of the men. Ritchie doesn't linger over anything; his style is terse and economical. The film is packed full of sharp, glancing details that reveal a great deal in just a few moments of screen time. Ritchie's understated style can highlight richly comic movements—as when Miss Salinas, a very calculating Mexican-American girl, rehearses an elaborate patriotic, baton-twirling plea for brotherhood, interrupting her emotioncharged sermon with businesslike asides to the technicians about her light cues. Or Ritchie's style can be more evocative, as when the slimy emcee sings goodbye to last year's Young American Miss, and middle-aged Brenda takes a step forward, hypnotized by the recollection of her own ephemeral triumph.

Perhaps the most admirable thing about *Smile* is the skill with which Ritchie introduces more serious, melancholy details without allowing them to throw the satire out of balance. For the film to have maximum

impact, we need to see at least one character who is going crazy in this antiseptic world of weenies, pom poms, and used car lots, and so Ritchie focuses on Andy DiCarlo, Brenda's frustrated husband, a man who no longer swallows the pieties that everyone else in town wants to ram down his throat. The dramatic climax—when Andy, enraged beyond the point of endurance, shoots Brenda and wounds her in the shoulder—is risky material for a comedy, but it works because it is handled with aptly understated black humor.

The ending has a slightly wistful flavor. Shaken by Andy's rebellion, his best friend Big Bob feels a nagging doubt about all the values he has championed. Big Bob sits alone in the auditorium after the girls have gone, watching the marine color guard take the flags out of the empty hall, and he tries to tell himself that the patriotic rituals are still meaningful; then he hears the marines talking about Miss Fountain Valley's knockers, and his last illusion is shattered. But Ritchie makes it clear that this disillusionment is only temporary. The next morning Big Bob is back on the job, hawking his used cars with at least a semblance of his old enthusiasm. One can contrast this ending to the maudlin, pretentious ending of *Shampoo*, where the amorous, opportunistic hairdresser undergoes a radical change of heart and stands weeping and forlorn on a hillside. *Smile* is a less selfconsciously "important" movie than *Shampoo*, but it is far superior, thanks to Ritchie's impeccable sense of proportion. He can allow Big Bob a sudden glimmer of perception without falsifying or sentimentalizing the character, and without suggesting that a momentary insight will change his life. Ritchie's subtle control of the tone of his movie demonstrates his intelligence, and his sophisticated sense of irony.

Perhaps the critics who attacked *Smile* didn't want to admit that they shared Michael Ritchie's cynical attitude toward the boobs in the heartland. The critics prefer to think of themselves as compassionate lovers of humanity, and they embraced *Hearts of the West*, a markedly inferior comedy that appeals to their fantasies about America. *Smile* is not a profound work, but in its unpretentious fashion, it demolishes some insidious American myths; the laughter it provokes is cleansing.

Reviews

SONYA RUDIKOFF

“Empress of Calvary”

EMILY DICKINSON AS THE QUEEN RECLUSE, the Myth of Amherst—that theme developed very early, within several years of her death, and became more intense as the documents of her life fell victim to the pieties of her entourage. Not until 1955 were important facts revealed, important letters made available, trunks and archives opened. Some of the short lyrics had been published before Dickinson’s death in 1886, but, incredibly enough, even though editions of her poems and letters began to appear in 1890, a major portion of her poetry was locked away for almost fifty years, and all of it was heavily edited. As for the correspondence, much of it was destroyed, and the rest suffered from editorial scruples.

Emily Dickinson lived out her life of fifty-six years in Amherst, near the College her grandfather founded, and her brother and father helped to administer. She never married, had no children, took care of her aging, ill parents, gardened, had a dog, cooked and cleaned house, raised plants in her greenhouse, played the piano, engaged in regular correspondence with ninety-odd friends and relatives over the years. Early in her story, there were sleigh-rides with Amherst students, walks and mountain climbs, picnics, Shakespeare circles, calling and receiving calls, church, Commencement teas, and local fairs. After thirty, she withdrew from Amherst life, seeing only the family at home and her brother and sister-in-law next door, and some few friends. Later, she would not even stay in the room with visitors, but stood in the hall or listened from the stairs, sending in notes and poems on a tray. For fifteen years, she did not even go next door, and then went only when her nephew died. Invited to visit Boston, she refused with “I do not cross my Father’s ground for any House or Town.” She stopped going to church or anywhere else. And in her last illness, the doctor was permitted to diagnose only as she passed in the hall.

A few poems were known during her lifetime. The *Springfield Republican* published several, including “I taste a liquor never brewed” (214) and “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers” (216), and when “Success is counted sweetest” (67) appeared in an anthology, it was thought to be by Emerson. She sent poems in, or as part of, letters, or with notes or flowers to friends and neighbors, but no one realized that there would be at least 1800 of them, hidden in bureau drawers, many of them neatly sewn together in little booklets. Perhaps a handful of editors and writers knew of her existence, and the few poems they saw struck them as awkward, untutored, or uneven. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the Boston literary man, visited her a few times, thought her “slightly cracked,” and she made him nervous. Helen Hunt Jackson, a childhood friend (and author

of *Ramona*), was helpful and admiring. Dr. Holland, another friend, the editor of *Scribner's Magazine*, was not.

Compare Shelley, say, in 1814: he has just returned from a hectic stay in Switzerland with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and Jane (later Claire) Clairmont, finds himself with no money, debts following him from England to Ireland to Wales, with revolutionary pamphlets and publishing schemes dominating his thought, as well as vegetarianism, literary friends, enemies, an estranged family, adoring sisters, a dramatic expulsion from Oxford, an abandoned wife and child in London, Mary pregnant, Jane ambiguously attached to him, and poems, scientific experiments, political enthusiasms, utopian communities, deceptions, confusions . . . We know of course what Arnold meant when, much later in the century, he exclaimed "What a set!" But apart from moral assessment, there was simply so much traipsing around, so much going on, so many acts and gestures and involvements, such complicated history of all those participants! And Shelley was only twenty-two, Mary nineteen!

Emily Dickinson's travels took her no further than Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, with a few visits to Springfield, and a few terms spent at Mount Holyoke. Her father and brother were public figures of some note, her father was in Congress for a time, and was active in Massachusetts politics. As daughter and sister, Emily took her place at the famous Dickinson Commencement teas and reunions, and in town events. Speculation about her disappointments in love were later widespread, and although denied by the family were later encouraged by her niece and others. A Presbyterian minister from Philadelphia, the editor of the *Springfield Republican*, a judge of the Massachusetts Superior Court—? All were possible candidates, but the absence of authoritative persuasive evidence is striking. Leaving Shelley aside as a special instance, other contemporary literary examples, especially literary women, such as George Eliot, Mrs. Browning, Charlotte Brontë, Jane Carlyle, are all better known to us, more vividly followed, less deliberately obscured. Dickinson's poems have been variously interpreted as referring to those three relationships or supposed relationships, but bushels of letters were burned right after her death, and little remains to confirm some of the hypotheses. The most mysterious documents, the "Master letters," with their intense anguished emotional expression, might be dramatic monologues, or appeals to a fantasied persona, might not be addressed to anyone identifiable at all!

During this time—1830-1886—American writers were quite visible in society, even the recusant Thoreau, and society itself was smaller; like-minded people were more easily known to one another, and even someone like Henry James can be traced everywhere. Emerson, Thoreau, Howells, Melville, Whitman, all were to be seen and heard, there was a reading public, there were social and intellectual circles, (such as Higginson's, in Boston), there were Americans and Europeans floating over the continents, finding one another and sharing travels. Later in the century, someone like Edith Wharton, with all *her* activity and visibility, offers the sharpest possible contrast to Dickinson, as does Helen Hunt Jackson

earlier. And compare Edith Wharton's late romance, with Emily Dickinson's: although the passion for Judge Lord is not disputed, and they even entertained thoughts of marriage, how scanty is the documentation of it! When Dickinson was lying in her coffin, Lavinia, her sister, placed two heliotropes in her hand "to take to Judge Lord"; but there are no diaries or private manuscripts, no night in the Charing Cross Hotel followed by a specific poem—nothing for the biographer of Emily Dickinson comparable to the material found by R. W. B. Lewis within thirty years of Edith Wharton's death.¹ The Dickinson biographer has to contend with missing and destroyed letters, deletions, false clues, deliberate obfuscation, general silence, squabbles over the literary remains even into the next generation, and mystery everywhere, not to speak of the inevitable mystery in the poetry itself.

Dickinson's story does not make stirring adventure, as Shelley's complex and dramatic life does, but Richard Sewall's solution in the recent two-volume biography² is to treat Dickinson's life as the life of a poet, its shape and momentum determined by the development of her vocation. This provides a specific organization of the material available to him. The first volume treats Dickinson's Puritan heritage, her ancestors, parents, brother, sister, and sister-in-law, all in considerable depth, and also gives considerable attention to Emily's relations with her sister-in-law, her brother Austin's late romance with Mabel Todd (well-documented), and the curious story of the publication of the poems. Sewall's second volume, more directly concerned with the poet, examines her childhood, education, early friendships, later relationships, her books and reading, and her poetic vocation. The most important material for this must be the poems and the existing letters, but there is some fascinating material on Dickinson's intellectual milieu, her early education at Amherst Academy, the background of Puritan concern, scientific scruple, and moral and intellectual commitment. At the Academy, and at Mount Holyoke, the curriculum, the teachers, and the students were all of an intelligent seriousness that inspired and exhilarated the young Emily. The thoroughness of Sewall's scrutiny of this early background becomes even more valuable when he traces and analyses its later appearance in the poetry. For example, Dickinson's poetry uses images of gems, minerals, and botany, of course, as well as an occasionally unusual scientific vocabulary. Sewall has related this to some of her early studies as well as to the intellectual and spiritual influence of Edward Hitchcock, philosopher, scientist, and later president of Amherst. (The "Quartz contentment," "Anthracite" temperature, "Columnar Self," "Granitic Base," and so on. And Sewall most interestingly compares one of Hitchcock's arguments about science and religion with one of Dickinson's poems of nearly twenty years later, "The Chemical conviction/ That Nought be lost" [954].) Other early influences were absorbed by this thrifty poet, and it is clear that when Thomas Wentworth Higginson asked her about her education

¹ R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975.)

² THE LIFE OF EMILY DICKINSON, 2 vols., by Richard Sewall. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$30.00.

and she coolly replied that she had Keats, the Brownings, Ruskin, Sir Thomas Browne, and *Revelations*, she did not mean that that was *all* she had!

Sewall's book is immense and comprehensive; it deserves every commendation. Perhaps the structure of it is too exclusively that of a biography of a vocation, so that events of some significance, such as Dickinson's death, are not related explicitly but only as incidental to another drama. Nor is anything else presented in narrative sequence; the important clusters of experience are ranged in circular or spiral progression, narrating the vocation *as* the life. Material on the family, the New England milieu, the close relationships, is introduced and sounded again in ever deepening pursuit, but there is some loss of the sense of a life being lived out. This is especially true for the anguished years between 1860 and 1865, when some of the best poetry was written, but when Dickinson was extremely troubled, and family and personal relationships were intense. The nation, too, was undergoing the anguish and division of the War, and although few poems even remotely refer to it, Dickinson's letters show her awareness of it, and her habit of close observation would insure that it affected her. Correspondence from these years with her close friends, the Hollands, does not exist, and Dickinson's eye trouble, her emotional attachments, her developing vocation, and other themes are not presented consecutively. Later, the older poet, passionately attached to Judge Lord, would have had daily visits from her brother (who was then himself in the midst of a similar passion for Mabel Todd, and who was profoundly estranged from his wife, Susan, once Emily's closest friend). Austin would meet Mabel at his sisters' house, he and Emily would address envelopes to each other's lover so the passionate letters would go undetected, and in the house next door Susan raged. The reader must go back to the first volume again, to review all the relationships and chronology in order to get the full dramatic sense of the consecutive daily experience. Of course, the inadequacy of the documentation, and the corrosive relationships and later the falsifying of materials, perhaps made the thematic scheme of organization a more fruitful one.

Mutilated and burned letters, hidden poems, and deliberate obfuscation may have kept Emily Dickinson remote, but in the past twenty years, the newly available material and the new scholarship allow a much better sense of the importance and brilliance of the poetry. (Indeed, the only distasteful part of Sewall's excellent work is his defensive argument for her importance at the end of his biography.) As might be expected, the bibliography has swelled, especially in recent years, and there is quite a lot known now about the circumstances of the poet's life, the background of the poems, the punctuation, imagery, themes, preoccupations. Dickinson is now treated as a modern poet, although she was tremendously concerned with some religious questions which are singularly absent from contemporary consciousness. She was not only obsessed with death and what it would feel like, or suffering and how *that* felt, but she thought constantly about immortality, retribution, God's purpose. These matters could be assumed to interest her friends too, even if not with the same

intensity, so she wrote letters about them too. Anyone brought up in a house where there were at least nineteen Bibles, and family prayers, anyone brought up in the Congregational Church, with its services three times a week, its sermons, and its Isaac Watts hymns, would think salvation and immortality quite as important and provocative as identity and authenticity are for our contemporaries. Dickinson of course stood at a certain distance from the received doctrine—that was what preoccupied her!—but the poems written against that background could, nowadays, demand almost as much suspension of disbelief as *The Iliad*! The danger in reading Dickinson too historically, as in

I shall know why—when Time is over—
And I have ceased to wonder why—
Christ will explain each separate anguish
In the fair schoolroom of the sky—

He will tell me what “Peter” promised—
And I—for wonder at his woe—
I shall forget the drop of Anguish
That scalds me now—that scalds me now! (193)

is to miss the irony and anxiety, but a too modern reading misses the genuine conflict and the seriousness of the question.

There are Dickinson subjects, Dickinson themes, a Dickinson style. There is an anthropomorphizing of nature, a kind of archness, as in “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” (288) or “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church” (324), with God as the “noted Clergyman,” and there are frequent invocations of Eternity, Circumference, Immortality, the themes “arranged” for her “orchestra” (as Kafka said of himself). One of the most significant of Dickinson’s image clusters is examined by Jean Mudge in *Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home*.³ This is an appropriate image in view of Dickinson’s almost entirely house-centered and home-bound life, and Mrs. Mudge is in an especially fortunate position to do it, as the Resident Curator of the Dickinson homestead in Amherst. She provides floor plans and quite detailed descriptions of the rooms, their probable furnishings and use during Dickinson’s lifetime, the additions and new wings, the gardens, the surroundings, arrangement of windows, beds, chairs, stoves. There are some interesting photographs of Emily’s writing table, chair, one of her white dresses. There was a hallway connecting the parlors and the front hall with dining room, kitchen, conservatory and library, and in the family it was called “the Northwest Passage.” It had five possible exits, and Emily Dickinson can be vividly imagined escaping⁴

³ EMILY DICKINSON AND THE IMAGE OF HOME, by Jean Mudge. University of Massachusetts. \$12.50.

⁴ Robert Weisbuch (cf. n.6 *infra*) offers the interesting suggestion that perhaps Emily Dickinson was not so much shy and fearful for herself in avoiding social occasions, as she was protective and thoughtful for others who might not feel equal to her intensity. She knew, better than Higginson, why she made him nervous!

through those corridors for her “polar privacy.” The big homestead was not Emily’s early home, there had been another house in Amherst, destroyed some twenty years ago, which Mrs. Mudge believes was even more central to Emily’s imaginative life than the larger homestead where the major poetry was written and where the family lived from 1855 on. Mrs. Mudge’s familiarity with the building and its detail, the movement of light, the view from the windows, the whole appearance and feeling of the homestead and of Amherst, and her intimate knowledge of every physical feature of the poet’s environment all contribute greatly to a more palpable sense of Dickinson’s life.

Close attention by Mrs. Mudge reveals a startling number and complexity of images of house and home. There is an intense concern not only with the specific house, but with parts and aspects, such as rooms, doors, windows, roofs, cellars, thresholds, garrets, porches, hearths, shelves, closets, and keys. Not only is house or home the subject of many poems—as in “I—Years had been from Home” (609), or “A House upon the Hight” (399) or “I learned—at least—what Home could be—” (944), but the house and its features were intensely grasped for the presentation of complex spiritual states in metaphorical experiment, as in

Remembrance has a Rear and Front—
 ‘Tis something like a House—
 It has a Garret also
 For Refuse and the Mouse.

Besides the deepest Cellar
 That ever Mason laid—
 Look to it by it’s Fathoms
 Ourselves be not pursued—(1182)

which is at the same time abstract and specific—the homestead *did* have a granite and brick foundation six feet deep! “The Props assist the House” (1142), “One need not be a Chamber to be Haunted” (670), and “I dwell in Possibility—/ A fairer House than Prose” (657) are other examples. The entire domestic vocabulary offered a convenient and significant web of images capable of seemingly endless variation and depth, repeatedly responsive to the intense emotional and spiritual demands of Dickinson’s vision, and flexible enough for experiment.

Mrs. Mudge uses ideas of Erikson, Freud, Bachelard, and others to reinforce her belief in the meaning of the images of house and home in Dickinson’s poetry. She avails herself of Erikson’s well-known essay on womanhood and inner space to interpret the feminine inwardness of the house imagery, Bachelard’s ideas about the psychology of space, Freud’s on enclosed places, Kenneth Burke’s very important comments about associational clusters and the psychic and physical accompaniments or origins of imaginative constructs. Over all is a Hopkins-like notion about a Dickinson inscape of space. An instance of the house image may, for Mrs. Mudge, refer to Emily the woman, in her feminine identity of girl, woman

in love or spinster, it may also refer to the sense of security, hopes for immortality, conviction of God's purpose; but home may also signify the sense of not being "at home" in the world, or hoping there is a place to feel at home in the world to come, or fancying herself the Bride of Christ in the home as a scene of suffering, or of Christ and Bride at once. The pervasive usefulness of what Mrs. Mudge calls the Dickinson inscape is such that whenever Dickinson wished to engage a number of different subjects she drew upon her vocabulary of domestic experience.

Home was a powerful idea for the new nation, and Mrs. Mudge shows how frequently it appealed and how strikingly in the writers who influenced Dickinson, such as the Brownings, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Thoreau. The idea of home in Shakespeare was certainly another influence on Dickinson (for whom Shakespeare was a staple: "Why is any other book needed?"!) and surely the significance of house and home all through the Bible, from the "dwelling-place" of the Old Testament to the "edification" of St. Paul, is self-evident. Nineteenth-century America, with its Land Acts and Homestead Act, with explorations of the West and migration from the Old World, with war and strife and national division, where everyone was welcome but no one was really at home, this new nation was peculiarly sensitive to such imaginative preoccupation.

The house imagery is deceptively simple, however, and there are some risks in concentrating on it, or extrapolating too much from Emily's experience in the specific homestead. Given what we know of her daily occupations, it seems odd how selective she is in her use of the house imagery. Cooking, cleaning, baking, and serving of food are singularly absent from the imagery, and the cup which Mrs. Mudge emphasizes is surely ceremonial or sacramental as much as domestic. Images of Emily's industrious letter-writing, or of the intense family network, or of taking care of the sick hardly appear. It seems that more care should be exercised, more skepticism displayed in connecting her life and art. Perhaps the house imagery is altogether less a natural consequence of Dickinson's femininity or house-and-home-centred life than it is an abstract and highly contrived network of metaphors, no more psychologically grounded than any other set of terms might be. Mrs. Mudge is not unaware of the contradictory nature of the vocabulary of house and home (sanctuary and prison, freedom and restriction) and the burden of Dickinson's experience as "The Wife—without the Sign!"⁶ but too much attention to the background of it might obscure the self-mocking of that anguished persona, the "Empress of Calvary." When Dickinson died, the town clerk

⁶ The contradiction is also a very literary one, and she was almost as allusive in her poems (and especially in her letters) as any modern poet. For this poem—"Title divine—is mine" (1172) the reader needs to remember not only that Emily didn't marry, and remained in the family homestead, and had fantasy passions, but that she knew Shakespeare thoroughly and was in the habit of referring to entire plays by means of a phrase or line. Cf. Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*: "'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see,/ The Name and not the thing." And earlier, "Is this the way?" We are thus urged to think not only of the "Empress of Calvary," lugubriously, but also of a lot of ironic Shakespearean heroines, betrayed and betraying.

recorded her occupation as "At home": was that to be understood so simply? Hundreds of poems point to the ambivalence, to Dickinson's almost irritable refusal to be pinned down, her presentation of that persona "in Vision—and in Veto!"

The exclusive concentration on Dickinson's intentions in the use of this house imagery can justifiably provoke questions about the resonance of her entire vocabulary, and Professor Sewall's defense of the poet at the end of his biography suggests that there may have been too narrow a conception of Dickinson's meaning. Put simply, what does the poetry signify beyond what it means for Emily Dickinson? Another recent study of the poetry, Robert Weisbuch's,⁶ offers an alternative and corrective view. He, too, has responded to the house image, as in "I dwelt in Possibility," but the Dickinson of his analysis speaks and sees in a "Compound Vision" as well as "New Englandly." The poetry records tenuous resolutions of the continuing conflict between "the two Emily Dickinsons, visionary celebrant and skeptical sufferer," and does it by means of a poetics based on analogy, which needs to be perceived, rather than a poetics based on allegory, requiring translation. In a profound contradiction of Mrs. Mudge's ideas about the house imagery, this critic then asserts that the unique quality of the poetry is its *scenelessness*, its lack of spatial reference. The house images, and all the rest, illustrate or point or warn, but do not "mean" something else. Dickinson's analogical esthetic thus eliminates the "traditional dichotomies of inner and outer":

Most often, the boundary of a Dickinson poem is not a particular scene or situation but the figure of the analogy as it moves from scene to scene. Dickinson gives us a pattern in several carpets and then makes the carpets vanish.

Weisbuch calls the method "analogical collection," and demonstrates the way images are assorted, or grouped for their cumulative effect, in some brilliant comments on lyrics such as "How many schemes may die" (1150), "Did the Harebell lose her girdle" (213), "As the Starved Maelstrom laps the Navies" (872) (where the "as" is comparative not narrative), and in a spirited interpretation of what he calls the single most difficult poem Dickinson wrote:

My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—
In Corners—till a Day
The Owner passed—identified
And carried Me away—

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods—
And now We hunt the Doe—
And every time I speak for Him—
The Mountains straight reply—

⁶ EMILY DICKINSON'S POETRY, by Robert Weisbuch. University of Chicago Press. \$10.00.

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow—
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through—

And when at Night—Our good Day done—
I guard My Master's Head—
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
Deep Pillow—to have shared—

To foe of His—I'm deadly foe—
None stir the second time—
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye—
Or an emphatic Thumb—

Though I than He—may longer live
He longer must—than I—
For I have but the power to kill,
Without—the power to die—(754)

Here the analysis demonstrates quite clearly why Dickinson's poems are not to be translated or decoded. Most readings of the poem identify the speaker and the "owner" of the gun, and come up with an ode to love, a frontier romance, a tale of poetic inspiration, a worship of power, or other capsule meanings, but then run into difficulties with the ending. Weisbuch's analogical reading is too long to quote but he shows how the poem itself defies literal translation and is more profound and more successful and more interesting when read differently.

Most of this analysis, and, in fact, the entire study, takes its cue from Dickinson's remark to Higginson, "When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse—it does not mean—me—but a supposed person." Writers often make such statements and critics as often discount them, preferring to see a self-protective or dissembling impulse. In Dickinson's poetry, the usual course is to reject the disclaimers, and search for situations, persons, feelings, scenes: the sister left out of the brother's marriage, the angry resentful daughter, the remorseful spinster, the tempted and troubled believer, the woman of secret passions for older married men, the woman as a child of nature, and so on. Weisbuch's thinking is quite opposite; the poems are to be read rather as complex expressions. They are not the romantic cries of Emily of Amherst, blushing unseen, but voices, personae, attitudes, chosen to illustrate and resolve conflicts of celebration and suffering. Collected and ranged against one another, in a succinct analogical relation, none of them bears the real meaning. Dickinson poems often read differently—such as "The Soul has Bandaged Moments" (512), "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers" (216), "Because I could not stop for Death" (712), and "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" (280)—thus appear in a new light, more tough-minded, more interesting.

Perhaps the greatest benefit to be derived from this perspective is the possibility of rescuing Dickinson from the coy, the arch, the sententious. Weisbuch sees these 1800 or more lyrics as a major poetic effort, a single connected series, and whether or not this idea is accepted, there is no doubt that Dickinson, like any great poet, has been vulnerable to the limited reading, the literal and melodramatic interpretation. As the lyricist of birds and seasons, she is a famous casualty: a poem such as "The morns are meeker than they were" (12) could never have achieved its innocent notoriety if analogical readings were more widespread. Dickinson's dialectical method of composition is thus not merely the method of her best poetry, not only the method for the "difficult" subjects—death, immortality, the "flood" subjects—but for *all* subjects. Indeed, there can no longer be such a view of Dickinson's subjects: the poems about harebells and bees, the seemingly childlike naive query about whether "Farmers" actually "Hoe" in "Paradise," the daisies and the buzzing flies are all as difficult as Christ, Consciousness, and Renunciation.

Dickinson as a person was strange and intense, full of feeling, marked by scruple, passionate for truth, an artful dissembler, addicted to wit, a self-designated superior person, one who questions rather than pardons, a reader, an observer for whom "Exhilaration—is within" (363). New England, even Amherst, knew many such women then, and even knew them in a kind of modern psychological depth prophetic of later insight and knowledge. The biographer of Dickinson's friend and idol, Samuel Bowles, in 1885 sketched the familiar type with

... fine intellect, an unsparing conscience, and a sensitive nervous organization; whose minds have a natural bent toward the problems of the soul and the universe; whose energies, lacking the outlet which business and public affairs give to their brothers, are constantly turned back upon the interior life, and who are at once stimulated and limited by a social environment which is serious, virtuous, and deficient in gayety and amusement. There is naturally developed in them high mental power, and almost morbid conscientiousness, while, especially in the many cases where they remain unmarried, the fervor and charm of womanhood are refined and sublimated from personal objects and devoted to abstractions and ideals. They are platonic in their attachments, and speculative in their religion; intense rather than tender, and not so much soothing as stimulating.

New England knows such women still, and knows their poetry, with its "Compound Vision" and its perceptions found or announced "in Vision—and in Veto!" Anne Sexton comes to mind, and Selma Isenman, and even Sylvia Plath, all of them tragic contemporary versions of an enduring type. Many of them live out their Calvaries with less awareness of themselves than Dickinson had, hurling their bolts of melody from more electric skies, in more chilling loneliness, and perhaps—who knows?—with less personal reward.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE

Poetry Chronicle

NEW VOLUMES OF POETRY continue to appear on a scale which must be unprecedented in the history of our literature. Once again the quarter has produced far more volumes than one chronicler can decently review. The process of selection has been, as always, difficult, painful, and, no doubt, arbitrary. With apologies to those who have, perhaps unjustly, been passed over, who have to wait for the next chronicle or none at all, I go on to the fifteen poets who emerged from my process of screening—merciless but without final authority—as the best, or those most worthy of consideration in inadequate detail.

Howard Nemerov¹ goes on and on and on writing good poems; almost always in iambics, occasionally rhymed quatrains or sonnets but mostly blank verse. As yet another book comes out or an entire number of *Poetry* is devoted to him, I keep expecting to find that he is (like some I could name) writing too much. Not so. He seldom fails, he constantly delights, and I have asked myself what his secret is. It is not in the prosody. The versification, like the tone of discourse, is low-keyed, and strict count is maintained to a degree that even suggests incomplete confidence. I wish he would rumple his lines a little more. But he has exceptional qualities of mind, and he is an *interesting* poet, alike through choice of subject and through exploitation of his subject, which process is, unlike his versification, brilliant, original, and full of surprises. Nemerov, and this is one of the themes of our day, explores the ordinary. “Late Late Show,” “Watching Football on TV,” “Waiting Rooms,” “Pockets”: the poems which go with those titles are about exactly what the titles say they are about; but in this unpromising material surprises are uncovered and displayed, as in the one about watching football:

We watch all afternoon, we are enthralled
To what? some drama of the body and
The intellectual soul? of strategy
In its rare triumphs and frequent pratfalls?
The lucid playbook in the memory
Wound up in a spaghetti of arms and legs
Waving above a clump of trunks and rumps
That slowly sorts itself out into men?
That happens many times. But now and then
The runner breaks into the clear and goes,
The calm parabola of a pass completes
Itself like destiny, giving delight
Not only at skill but also at the sight
Of men who imitate necessity

¹ THE WESTERN APPROACHES, by Howard Nemerov. University of Chicago. \$7.95.

By more than meeting its immense demands.

In "Fiction" "The people in the elevator all/ Face front, they all keep still, they all/ Look up with the rapt and stupid look of saints/ In paintings at the numbers that light up/ By turn and turn to tell them where they are." In addition to those subjects which may appear uninteresting in themselves and unpromising for poetry, there are those which by their very obvious promise, and frequent use, inhibit originality: the seasons, the ocean, the trees. "The Measure of Poetry" begins with an altogether striking study, in prose (an essay rather than a prose poem) of the waves of the sea; though the application by analogy to poetry itself seems less successful. "First Snow" leads Nemerov into a vision of the world's great cities forever snowed under after the sun ("Being after all a mediocre star") burns out. "Meanwhile,/ It only hisses through the whitening grass,/ And rattles among the few remaining leaves." I do not know that the sound of snow has ever been so caught. Furthermore, first snow is something most of us notice every winter, without having it motivate the gigantic fantasy you will find if you read this poem.

For me, reading A. R. Ammons² has always been work: work in order to find out what he is saying, sometimes how he is saying it and why he says it the way he does. And I come out with a mixed bag of appreciations. Consider the first poem in the book, "Transcendence":

Just because the transcendental,
having digested all change into
a staying, promises foreverness,

it's still no place to go, nothing
having survived there into life:
and here, this lost way, these

illusory hollyhocks and garages,
this is no place to settle: but
here is the grief, at least,

constant, that things and loves
go, and here the love that
never comes except as permanence.

A small poem, a good poem. You cannot just go racing through it, but ponder it a little and it is beautiful and true, except for the last ten words, which seem to contradict the rest. Sometimes Ammons achieves an exceedingly precise observation of what is not obvious, as in "Meeting the Opposition":

The wind sidles up to
and brusquely in a swell flattens

² DIVERSIFICATIONS, by A.R. Ammons. Norton. \$6.95.

lofting one side
of the spirea bush:
but the leaves have

so many edges, angles
and varying curvatures that
the wind on the other side
seeps out in a
gentle management.

Note, by the way, that there's never an iambic; and why those lines are broken just the way they are I have simply no idea. A poet as skilled in words' use as this one must know what he is doing, but sometimes this reader does not. At other times, Ammons draws striking analogies between plants or geography or machinery and our works, what makes us tick, or fail to. So, from "Pray Without Ceasing," a twenty page poem:

little artery, couple inches long,
branching into cardiac muscle: it pops
and you give up philosophy and
ultimate concern, car payments, son and wife,
you give up the majors & minors,
the way you like your egg cooked, your
class ring, lawn,
sparrows nesting in the garage, the
four crocus bulbs (maybe more next
year), toenails and fillings:

That this should be led up to by an account of how to use the washing machine in the laundromat may be right and proper, but did that account have to be so *long*? It goes two pages, and is interrupted by whimsies that sound like Joyce at his most boringly whimsical, such as "stopcock/ cock & bull/ ears cocked/ cocktail/ peacock/ cockle/ cockney/ cockiness/ cockscomb/ poppycock/ cockeyed/ cockroach/ cockpit/ cocksure." To save space I have not draped these words on the page as Ammons does. Does it matter? For a fine uncontaminated poem, try "Narrows." It begins with the Straits of Gibraltar, but leads on to all kinds of straits and constrictions and what they mean.

This bemedalled poet has a fine mind and his own style. He can be chatty and cute; but he can be honorably difficult, and he too, so mostly unlike Nemerov, can find what is not ordinary in ordinary things.

Coming to Donald Finkel,³ we continue with the contemplation and exploitation of the commonplace. In free verse. What are his forms? He has no rules that I can see. What are his subjects? Rooms and furniture and bricks, trees, the elements and machinery, are personified, they have their fates and their feelings. Here is water, from "Morning Song": "passed her in the harbor/ dumb blue angel/ pale wings dragged with

³ A MOTE IN HEAVEN'S EYE, by *Donald Finkel*. Atheneum. \$7.95.

grease/ stood in the shadow and let her lick mud from my shoes." In "Sand," sand is the work of "the lamb/ whose mild contemplative molars/ nibbled the pastures bald/ broke the back of the hill/. . . while the land/ slid/ cautiously/ out from under." Finkel has also dreamed up a "Lame Angel": an apologetic unsuccessful amateurish alter ego angel dogged by his shadow and haunted by Sybil, a female counterpart. Here they are in one of their appearances ("Sybil's Leaves"):

Weighted with wrongs his briefcase rolls
inches above the ground
on invisible rails
wind lifts his cold nose
the skirts of his topcoat

Sibyl waves from her door
in her plastic wrapper
a beer in her fist
a filter king in her teeth
trailing ashes and catastrophe

if there were nothing to fear
his flesh would invent it
he stoops to read the fallen leaves
before he can make out their scrawl
wind turns all the pages

Sometimes, when his grim fantasies over-extend themselves, Finkel is found less successful. "They" begins exceedingly well, but in the third stanza (if the irregular groupings of free verse lines are to be called stanzas) I lose him. The men with power saws have been at the trees:

they have brought a machine that eats trees
that shits sawdust
they cut off limbs to feed it
snarling it chews the pale green fingers of the plane
the pin-oak's wrinkled elbows and knees
they fill truck after truck with the dust
in the schoolyard now they are cutting down the children
I hear their screams
first at the ankles
it is nothing then to sever
their soles from the asphalt
there is no danger their falling
on the school and crushing it

But while fantasy may fail (not Lame Angel, however), Finkel deals with real things and real happenings with an exquisitely calculated brutality.

There are so many poets we feel we have to try to like because we are constantly being reminded of their presence: the fashionable names like

Gary Snyder and David Ignatow and Robert Creeley and John Ashbery. Or even Ammons. Or even Bly (see below). It is a blessed comfort to read and report on Fred Chappell⁴ because I can like reading him immediately and without any effort whatever.

Chappell gives us eleven poems (he calls them "a poem") which in part compose the fragments of an autobiography. But the substance that pervades all of them is water. While his grandmother washes her feet she discourses about the awful relatives they never see and seldom talk about. The poet as a boy was sent down the well to clean it: a horrifying experience of "Twelve plastic pearls, monopoly/ Money, a greenish rotten cat,/ Rubber knife, toy gun,/ Clock guts, wish book, door key,/ An indescribable female hat." A well of Lethe and Memory all in one, a living death. His wife Susan takes a shower and causes a shimmering rainbow poem, a long stream-of-consciousness-and-water without one suspicion of prurience or fatty detail. A science-fiction Adam is indoctrinated in the meaning of words by an astral Eve (or Lilith?), and the first word he gets out (after a struggle) is *water*, or possibly *wodor* or *wat-tar* or *wazzar* or maybe *wawa*. Behold grandfather baptized by Baptists (from "My Grandfather Gets Doused"):

Maybe now he didn't want it much,

But ringed by mutely sniggering men
And contraltos making moues,
He managed a foolish unaccustomed grin

And plunged to his knees in ooze
And rush of Pigeon River.
What a bad black bruise

Of reputation! Never
In a thousand thousand thousand years
Had Davis or Clark turned hard-believer

Baptist. Weeping wormy tears
His Methodist fathers screamed
In paid-for plots. My uncles' sneers

Rose like spiritual kites. Who dreamed
Heresy lurked in his slick Sibelius-like head?
It was not seemly what he seemed.

Dead,
And grounded like a hog or horsefly, would
Be better than raving Baptist. No one admitted

It, but to be good

⁴ RIVER, by Fred Chappell. Louisiana State University. \$3.95.

Was to be Methodist.
And everybody should.

Chappell combines the shrewd humanity of the Southern story-teller (and we have had so many good ones, and he is also a writer of fiction) with the poet's eye and ear. Verse forms are varied, control is sure. One can select images. "Strands of current nudge into arpeggios the wide keyboards of white-bait." Is that too fancy? Perhaps, but it works. "She leaned/ And pulled the plug. The water circled gagging/ To a bloody eye and poured in the hole like a rat." But many many other poets can do the single image for you to pick for in the waste-heap. Chappell writes whole poems.

John Gill⁵ has this to say about himself: "These poems represent the best of 10 years of poetry. And they document the change in consciousness of the poet from being a city person to becoming a country one." Thus, since this seems to be a first book, he is a late poet; he tells us elsewhere that he has been married forty years, and his photo shows a gray beard. The poems after their prologues (reminiscences of a youth in Chicago) are about the poet and, indeed, country matters: himself, his wife, his house and his neighbors, sparrows, owls, crows, cats: the seasons and lakes and earth. Abjuring formality and rhyme, with an ear neither magical nor faulty, he derives his effects not from imagery but, mostly, from subject matter. Simply in itself, the beheaded carcass ("Meat") of a steer with a "knobbly/ red mushroom stump where the head was," with "legs stiff as an invitation/ or as a supplication/ to something indecent" has only to be observed and set down in order to shock and impress. Such a poem as "Rural News" speaks for itself and needs no gloss:

at the end of a severe winter
 (mother dead
 father dead
 sisters & brothers all gone)
 under 18 blankets
 a W.W.1 army greatcoat
 6 sweaters 2 work shirts
 3 pairs of pants 2 pairs of woolen socks
 & one pair of dirty longjohns
 he was found dead in his parents' bed
 by neighbors
 who when all things sniff outofdoors
 wondered why he didn't appear
 & lift his face cautiously
 to the faint twinge of spring.
 instead he marched the other way
 to an ever-narrowing measure
 & foetal ledge as cold as his source
 & as putridly stale as the fates
 who arrange such scenes.

⁵ COUNTRY PLEASURES, by *John Gill*. The Crossing Press. \$4.95.

But sometimes with rather more subtlety Gill can isolate and eternalize a dishevelled moment, as in "5/7/69":

wld. you believe it
 she's kneeling on the ground hunched over
 pulling weeds from the old strawberry bed
 it's cold for May & damp
 it's been raining & it's abt. to rain

her hair falls in her face
 she separates pulls
 & throws the weeds over her shoulder
 continuous small flying motions

squat muddy at home
 a woodchuck beside its burrow
 never took so sweet a day

That took doing.

The subtitle of Ruth Stone's new book⁶ is "Poems and Ballads." Quite so; there is a difference. Let us take the better first, and that's the poems. These are short, and frequently full of sharp observation: "A leaf imitating a dying butterfly falls in reluctant spirals" ("Beginning to Live"): "Willows bend like ostrich fans/ Held by insincere ladies" ("The Late Comers"). There are whole good poems, like "Overlapping Edges":

Starlings flock to roost across rubble of shocked corn,
 Last summer's scattered bone stalks ready to be ploughed
 under;
 As though we were dismembered, as though we were in an
 open grave.
 A veil of powdered limestone is suspended.
 It is the fertilizer man in the corn field.
 In the open pits of Auschwitz, scattered thigh bones,
 matchstick arms.
 Through veils of limestone at the far edge,
 Tombs of highrise apartments, silent, without lament.
 And starlings, generations of birds puzzling along the
 windrows.

"Tic Tac Toe" is as good; or "Bargain," which aptly prefaces a volume called *Cheap*, and which ends: "'Sweet cream and curds . . . / Who will have me,/ Who will have me?'/ And close upon my words,/ 'I will,' said poverty." These are hard and honest poems. But there are failures too. "The Infant" begins:

The sky is a fat belly
 Blown up with gas,

⁶ *CHEAP*, by Ruth Stone. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$3.95.

With millions of belly buttons.

The sky is going to endure four more metaphors, or metamorphoses, after this, and it isn't going to get any better. A succession of six surrealistic poems, from "Dream of Wild Birds" through "As Now," constantly fails to jell. Even in the better poems there is little metrical character, as for the rhymed ballads, they seem to be frankly doggerel and one wonders why they are there. How could the poet of "Overlapping Edges" and a score of others equally good have perpetrated (for example) "The Sweeper and the Sweeper's Son"? This begins:

There was an old lady lived on the fourth floor,
With a ral-dee-o and daughters four.
She spent her time tweezing her beard
For she feared their disgust at the sight of her weird
Chin whiskers. Oh, the pity.
She was hirsute and her eyes were bleared.
She cried all day behind her door, "What a bore!
Have mercy on four young girls in a wicked city."

I don't understand.

Donald Thomas⁷ is one of two British poets reviewed here. The other is Hill. Thomas has a taste for the macabre. In the title poem, Isadora Duncan is garrotted, as everybody knows, by her own scarf. In a rustic idyl ("The Countryside in June"), a young man bludgeoned prickly nature—thistles, brambles, nettles, young trees—to make a country bed for his love. As they lay there, he handed her a chocolate. There was a wasp on it. She bit it in two and it stung her. She strangled on her swollen tongue as he raced to drive her where help might be.

These two, and some others, are good whole disagreeable poems. Throughout, the verse, mostly classical in form, is well turned. The ear is true, the eye sharp with a fine sense of color. There are many splendid passages or bits, as in the beginning of "Memoirs":

Unaware that the light was bad; that the band
Had begun; that the shrubs, pink and crimson,
Thickened the warm salt wind; that the dark girls,
As they strolled, stared most of all at him,
Though without curiosity.

Note the effortless fluency of this blank verse. Or take (from "Penny Telescope"): "On salmon-coloured mud/ Rise the dark reeds." Or (from "Lundy"):

Heaven's kingdom rises north of Hartland Quay,
Where Kingsley saw the inshore green

⁷ WELCOME TO THE GRAND HOTEL, by *Donald Thomas*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. np.

Turning to sapphire in the late Atlantic day.

Yet I find far more good bits than good poems. The macabre is overdone, the poems can be too clever and trip over their own cleverness. Thus, in the whole "Ensign Carruthers" series, despite dazzling details, a point is made of making no point. At worst, the style parodies itself, as when in "Twilight at the Zoo" eighteen short lines give us "dark surge; apricot flesh of cloud; cropped lawns; blue night; tame cats; spelt language; black sky; incandescent cumulus; open theatre; terracotta urns; trapped cat; crossing night winds; arched goat; pink drifts; sleek dogs; lupine prowl." All ingenuity has gone into finding the piquant or unlikely attributive, and none into its placing. There is here, nevertheless, a great deal of skill and talent.

Elder Olson^a offers a rather oddly assorted volume (some very good books of verse are oddly assorted). There is a little verse play with actors who habitually travel in the masks of Pierrot, Polichinelle, Pantaloon, Harlequin, and Columbine. I can't say very much for it and it takes up more than half the volume. Many of the poems are excellent. "Four Immensely Moral Tales" are delightfully told in the traditional numbers of Belloc. Consider the case of Monsieur Chameau, who was "much too fond of fine array." He woke one morning to find that his clothes shoes tie spats gloves and even pince-nez were assembling themselves and walking out on him, and, (as he

Swore not uttering *Sacrebleu*
Nor *Sacre Nom* nor *Nom de Dieu*
But rather many and many a *mot*
Français that you will never know)
This fantasy of clothes although
Empty quite of one Chameau
Strolled most elegantly away
Through the door and down the stair
And out upon the pavement where
The neighbors soon were heard to say
"*Bonjour, monsieur*" "*Chameau mon cher*"
But you surpass yourself today."

We take ourselves very seriously, and light-hearted comic verse is a rarity; still more so a light-hearted comic poet, which Olson is not. He says of himself in a prefatory note: "If these poems range from jocosity to fury and near-suicidal despair, that is because they reflect the kind of person I happen to be and the world we happen to live in." Of the grimmer poems, "The Daguerrotype of Chopin" is perhaps the finest, but "The Mad Priest of the Mountain" is short and therefore quotable:

"The farmer nailed the shot hawk, not quite dead,

^a OLSON'S PENNY ARCADE, by *Elder Olson*. University of Chicago. \$7.95.

To the barn door; it hangs there, wings outspread.
 Keep your carved Christs on crossed sticks;
 I take this for my crucifix,"
 The mad priest of the mountain said.

"Christ's fault was to fall foul of the wrong lot;
 The hawk's to venture within rifle-shot.
 Puzzle till you burst your brain;
 What pain means is pain, pain;
 We give it meanings it has not."

John N. Morris in this, his second volume,⁹ presents poems which are mostly short and mostly in short two-or-three-beat lines, occasionally rhymed or half-rhymed. Let us look first at one of his best poems, "In the Hamptons":

Much here is historical
 And dull, but not therefore.
 What has occurred since
 Is the rich.
 Here, fully clothed,
 They summered relentlessly

Miles from the nearest
 Jew or serious painter.
 All day their trim,
 Pictorial waves
 Relaxed ashore
 In weather clear as gin.

But the last man in America
 To play tennis in flannels
 Is dead. Beyond Queens,
 Borough of cemeteries,
 Dressed in an idea
 About taste as money,
 A future approaches
 The invented lanes;
 To these few beautiful,
 Talkative miles
 Of bad behavior
 The repressed returns.

Although all night
 At Montauk,
 An end of America,

⁹ THE LIFE BESIDE THIS ONE, by John N. Morris. Atheneum. \$7.95.

Washington's light
Still solves again
The pointless, eastward water,
Out of the drama of the dark
The snazzy summer theatre takes us in.

The theme of this seems to recur: the normal ordered happy and above all decorous life haunted by disorderly forces wishes lost memories and unassimilated selves. The "pointless, eastward water" finds an echo in the "family plot/ Become a pointless story" of "Near the Potomac"; or, in "Going Back for the Twentieth," the "polite, irrelevant wives" at the class reunion. The title poem has it all. But Morris is not always willing to be so clear. "Everywhere men/ Are dying always/ In their own tongue/ Where I could not/ Order dinner" (from "Against Silence"): the statement of the elusive here and elsewhere becomes itself elusive, and though this is no doubt intentional, the result is less happy. But Morris is a skilled and careful poet not tied to one theme (except impermanence, except dissatisfaction). "Running it Backward" is an adroit tour de force. A grown man (poet or his father?) disembraces his wife and backs into his car and proceeds to reverse his lifetime, "falls/ Through the grades/ Into his shorts/ And the birthday parties" until "It is time to be stopping/ For looking ahead/ We foresee what is true/ But improper to be shown." Garbage dumps and automobile graveyards ("Among the Alternatives") lead him to the incredibly compressed last line: "What lasts is waste." What's strong is restraint.

Much of the content in Philip Booth's new book¹⁰ is based, we are told, on the work of photographers. Black and white? I find light but little color. The verse lines are spare and taut. Subjects include Booth's familiar Maine and New Hampshire landscapes, tidal coasts and sea marshes, snowy winters and late springs; and wife and daughters and constantly the self seeking itself, eluding itself. Sometimes this reader feels like a stranger happening upon a man talking to himself over problems momentous to that man but obscure to the outsider; but still the conversation is handsome, though frequently stark. And sometimes it is all perfectly clear and still stark, as in "Household": "This sad house,/ Two girls gone./ The third girl/ left, fifteen./ Three years to/ go." And we hear of "same old/ parents. Same/ old meal." Three lines to the stanza, three syllables to the line, and the clanking monosyllables have the best of it. But the poet is not always in it. In "Pride's Crossing," one of the finest of these poems, an aristocratic lady recounts her ruined life in the form of a verse letter. And I like "A Dream of Russia," told in the first person, but it all happened "years/ before the last war." On the Trans-Siberian Railway, crew and passengers with their hands remount a car on a new axle; and the women "pelted/ the axle-pushers with skirts full/ of buttercups, of what looked like/ daisies, and with wild hundreds/ and hundreds of wild Russian/ flowers." These poems are too long to quote entire, but here is "The Incredible Yachts" entire:

¹⁰ AVAILABLE LIGHT by Philip Booth. Viking. \$4.95.

The incredible yachts: stays
 and halyards geared to tension,
 banks of winches on deck;
 they blew into harbor
 this evening: richly cruised men
 wed to aluminum hulls
 and fleet women: they raced
 to get here. Once at anchor
 in this stormed harbor,
 in this indelible weather,
 they bobbed the tide with
 their empties: none of them
 cared to know in truth
 what harbor they were in.

I do not see how that could be improved on.

Samuel Hazo¹¹ states his theme in the title poem, which I quote in part:

Inside the room
 inside myself, I multiply
 to four.

One *me* keeps
 siding with himself.

A second
 lives for death to hide
 from living.

A third believes
 he's everyone.

A fourth
 demands his heaven now.

I am not sure I can follow all the directions. But there are, as expected, the unexpected phrases and associations, the intensely personal Hazo in a slipping series of fixes in slipping time:

Whatever
 poetry I seek is where
 I've yet to go.

Already
 somehow there, I keep on
 naming what I almost know.

And

Boggled
 by wheels, walks, wings

¹¹ QUARTERED, by *Samuel Hazo*. University of Pittsburgh. \$2.95.

and waves, I've said much else
much worse.

These bits are from "Ex-Poems, Ex-Days." A part of the ambience is formed by those elusive outliers, the Happy Isles. True it is ("The First and Only Sailing") that

As for
the Happy Isles?
Let dreamers
dock there.
Believe in such,
and you'll believe that Essex,
More and Mary of Scotland
kidded the chopper on their climb
to God.

But later we find Hazo in warless Sweden and Switzerland, and they seem like paradise or at least purgatory for this walker through the middle of his life. Unlike Dante he has few encounters, but an amusing one with Giorgio Washington sculptured from carrara on the lake shore of Lugano. In short lines, swift successions, with a dash of casual inner and outer rhymes, Hazo seems to have found an open-ended style, and subject, and can go on and on. I hope he does.

The new volume by Robert Hayden¹² includes, with three earlier books, a valued handful of new poems. Hayden writes mostly as a black man and mostly in exquisitely pure English (colloquial only when appropriate). The record of wrong, past and present, is inevitably there. "Middle Passage," a six-page poem about the early slave trade, spares nothing, though it can pause to note the names of slave-ships—Jesus, Estrella, Esperanza, Mercy, Desire, Adventure, Tartar, Ann, and Bella J—as "the dark ships move,/ their bright ironical names/ like jests of kindness on a murderer's mouth." And there are the terrifying lynch-memories of "Night-Death, Mississippi," and the runaways of the Civil War (and the black soldier too) on down to the black man of today ("Tour 5") who stops to "buy gas and ask directions of a rawboned man/ whose eyes revile us as the enemy." These not surprising themes never degenerate into hysteria or propaganda. The poet who pursued them comes through as a temperate warm wise and cultured man and above all as a poet well skilled in language and line. His matter is varied and by no means exclusively black; or sometimes if so, in subtle and sophisticated ways. "The Peacock Room" is simply a lovely poem. Or consider "Butterfly Piece":

Brazilian butterflies, static and perfect as
enamelwork by Fabergé. Jewel corpses fixed

¹² ANGLE OF ASCENT, by Robert Hayden. Liveright. \$6.95.

in glass. Black opal flowerskin banded
neargold yellow; sea-agate striped berylgreen;

Colors so intense I imagine them heavy enough
to have broken the live wings—as human
colors in our inhuman world burden, break.

Occult prismatic blue of the Morpho,
the great prized Morpho that living seems
conjured forth by magic hands. Wild beauty
killed, sold to prettify.

There is something universal about that short poem. Or consider “A Plague of Starlings.” On Fisk campus the workmen have been shooting the swarming birds. The poem ends: “And if not careful/ I shall tread/ upon carcasses/ carcasses when I/ go mornings now/ to lecture on/ what Socrates,/ the hemlock hour nigh,/ told sorrowing/ Phaedo and the rest/ about the migratory/ habits of the soul.” Starlings are blackish, and the survivors had returned “like choiceless poor/ to a dangerous/ dwelling place.” True. But the irony and the compassion belong only to a master poet moved by such feelings.

According to Harold Bloom in his introduction, Geoffrey Hill dislikes his early poems, but has fortunately included them in his latest volume.¹³ Is this yet another case of revolt against form by one who had mastered it? The first book gives sonnets and stanzas in rhyme or assonance. In the second, rhymes and assonance are mostly discarded; we have unrhymed sonnet-lengths, and the lines are freer. The third, “Mercian Hymns,” is thirty prose poems: an unhappy mode in the main, as I think, although if you wrote the hymns out in lines you would find mostly very irregular blank verse. Or not even irregular; “Hymn XXIV,” for instance, begins: “Itinerant through numerous domains, of his lord’s retinue, to Compostela.” Sorry, but I like the earlier poems better. A mythic poet like Hill seems to need an external foundation, something more than the mere self some poets are limited to. For the prose sequence, he is supposed to have Offa, a partly legendary Mercian king, but Offa can be hard to find, he can be lost among schoolboys or in the garden or landscape or in general incoherence. The best poems are shaped with a strong hand from the Arthurian Cycle or the Plantagenets or the brutal beheadings and battles of the Wars of the Roses. Like “Merlin”:

I will consider the outnumbering dead:
For they are the husks of what was rich seed.
Now, should they come together to be fed,
They would outstrip the locusts’ covering tide.

Arthur, Elaine, Mordred; they are all gone
Among the rafted galleries of bone.

¹³ SOMEWHERE IS SUCH A KINGDOM, by *Geoffrey Hill*. Houghton Mifflin. \$3.95.

By the long barrows of Logres they are made one,
And over their city stands the pinnacled corn.

Like "The White Ship" (in which the only son of Henry I drowned):

Where the living with effort go,
Or with expense, the drowned wander
Easily: seaman
And king's son also

Who, by gross error lost,
Drift, now, in salt crushed
Polyp-and mackerel-fleshed
Tides between coast and coast,

Submerge or half-appear.
This does not much matter.
They are put down as dead. Water
Silences all who would interfere;

Retains, still, what it might give
As casually as it took away:
Creatures passed through the wet sieve
Without enrichment or decay.

Or like the last lines in "Requiem for the Plantagenet Kings": "before sleeked groin, gored head,/ Budge through the clay and gravel, and the sea/ Across daubed rock evacuates its dead," in which you may note the powerful employment of consonants, *b*, *d* and *g*. Sometimes the ringing lines make their point, but even when they go in one ear and out the other, they make a brave noise as they pass through.

While Alexander Laing's new book of poetry¹⁴ is not his first, it is the first to come along in approximately forty years. Sailor, novelist, teacher, authority on American sailing ships, he has remained true to his first love, poetry (unless it was chemistry, see p. 42). The scant eighty pages indicate a rigorously sparing selection from the work of many years, plus a burst of recent poems. A part of this last group consists of memory poems which go back to a father whom he disappointed, with whom he mostly did not get on, but with whom he was reconciled and remembers in this series with love and regret. The most moving piece is "The Trout." The father, bankrupt in the Depression, evidently dying, summoned strength to ask to be given trout because "they're feeding me on pap." The poem goes on to the double miracle of trout caught where no trout had been, and devoured by one who had no strength at all. That sounds flat when mutilated in epitome. It's in the telling:

¹⁴ BRANT POINT, by *Alexander Laing*. University Press of New England. \$3.75.

... "Turn him," the doctor said. "I just delivered a baby, an hour back—my exercise for the afternoon." I found the task obscene trying to get a grip on the dank flesh that had been my father. When I heaved him over there were two bed sores you could put your fist in. As the student dressed them I argued with my stomach. "Spell each other tonight," the doctor counseled. "Your mother needs her sleep." I followed him out to the running board of his Maxwell. "How long will it be?" I asked, and he replied, "How long do you want it to be?" "He's done for?" "Yes, he's done for. That's why we phoned you."

I have not seen dialogue in verse like that since Robert Frost. It's what few poets can do. "The Good Treason," too long to quote and ruined by hacking up, is a truly excellent patriotic poem; another rarity, almost unparalleled. The title poem, last in the book, has a sailing which involves the poet and his own son, told in a new sinewy style: a poem obscure in detail to a landlubber like me, but even such a one can value lines like these (the beginning):

High gulls flick late copper.
 At our backs a siren grieves,
 a bell's lip shakes the air.
 Peripheral bongs return
 coned from a front of fog above Coetue—
 thin cliff for echoes.
 Water's chilly ghost at turn of tide
 outflanks a ghosting yawl.
 We on the sand
 feel the quick plummet of her anchor rode
 for one last grip upon a slipping world.
 She veers in space.
 The foul tide sweeps to sea.

I come last to Robert Bly's new book,¹⁵ which is a collection of prose poems. I mentioned in connection with Hill that I have no particular love for that genre. The best exception I can think of is the group of sonnets by Petrarch as translated by J. M. Synge into his Anglo-Irish, where lack of metrical form is compensated for by the rhetoric of the original and the lilt of the language. Forego rhetoric, stay with the plainest English, and you might be asking too much of your reader. The compensation offered here is a rather emotional tone (exclamation points abound) plus extravagant and discordant similes and transformations. Only quotation will show what I am talking about. This is "Looking at a Dry Tumbleweed Brought in from the Snow" (a truly Wordsworthian title):

¹⁵ THE MORNING GLORY, by *Robert Bly*. Harper & Row. \$5.95.

What is this wonderful thing? Brown and everywhere! It has leaped up on my desk like surf, or like a bull onto a cow! It rushes everywhere in front of me . . . And my sleeping senses are shouted at, called in from the back of my head, to look at it! Well, it is only a broken-off bush, a tumbleweed, every branch different, and the whole bush the same, so in that way it is like the sea. Taken in from the deserted shore, it talks of queens sent away to live in cramped farmhouses, living in the dirt, and it talks of coffins and amazing arrows, no it is a love, some love we forget every day, it is my mother.

If I were out to get Bly, I would stop right there. He could scarcely do worse. But he can do better. "The Hockey Poem," despite its whimsies, will not be denied. "The Hunter" is better yet, and once again (though it is really too long) I have to quote:

I hear a ticking on the Pacific stones. A white shape is moving in the furry air of the seacoast. The moon narrow, the sea quiet. He comes closer, a long time the stick ticks on over the rock faces. Is it a postal employee saddened by the sleet? It comes nearer. I talk. The shape talks, it is a Japanese man carrying a spear and a heavy-bellied little bag. The spear has a hook on the end. What are you looking for, clams? No! Octopus!

Did you get any? I found three. He sits down. I get up and walk over. May I see them? He opens the plastic bag. I turn on the flashlight. Something wet, fantastic, womblike, horse-intestine-like. May I take hold of one? His voice smiles. Why not? I reach in. Dry things stick to my hands, like burrs from burdocks, compelling, pleading, dry, poor, in debt. You boil them, then sauté them. I look and cannot find the eyes. He is a cook. He ate them in Japan.

So the octopus is gone now from the mussel-ridden shelf with the low roof, the pool where he waited under the thin moon, but the sea never came back, no one came home, the door never opened. Now he is taken away in the plastic bag, not understood, illiterate.

The pathetic fallacy which seems to be required for these prose poems is here justified.

I will conclude. All the poets reviewed above are original in this sense, that whether writing on a subject as unusual as pockets or as usual as trees or the seasons, they do it their own way. They have their distinctive voices. Mostly quiet voices. I find little elevation, little of the grand manner, or passion, except in Hayden, Hill and Laing. But there is much wit and wisdom and much that is delightful, and it is exhilarating to one chronicler to have found so much good poetry in just one quarter of this year.

GRACE SCHULMAN

Song of Our Cells

THERE IS AN UNEXPECTED RESEMBLANCE between two current books that would seem to be worlds apart. They look alike, and have similar titles that are printed in exactly the same kind of swirling letters on pale-colored jackets: *The Lives of a Cell*, by Lewis Thomas;¹ *The Life of Poetry*, by Muriel Rukeyser.² Gazing at them on my shelf, I feared they might have suffered a change that was magical, like alchemy, or natural, like cell fusion—that phenomenon in which two complete, alien genomes become part of a single cell. I separated them, suspecting the books were living things.

To begin with, their texts have affinities, as in the following passages:

We do not have solitary beings. Every creature is, in some sense, connected to and dependent on the rest. . . . There is a tendency for living things to join up, establish linkages, live inside each other, return to earlier arrangements, get along, whenever possible. This is the way of the world.

(*The Lives of a Cell*)

*

But our age, in the promise of its science and its poetry, has made available to all people the idea of one world. . . . Contained in this truth is the unity of the imagination.

(*The Life of Poetry*)

In many ways, the two writers could not be less alike. Dr. Thomas, a microbiologist and former Dean of Yale Medical School, writes in a seemingly casual but intense, whimsical prose about the nature of living things; Miss Rukeyser, a poet who envisions the unity of all people, writes in a vatic tone of poetry's urgency. Despite their differences, though, the charming scientist and the pythonic poet echo one another like humpback whales, communicating, to paraphrase one of Dr. Thomas' examples, in signals. "Lewis Thomas here," one writer says; "Muriel Rukeyser here," the other answers. Indeed, communication is one of the subjects of their dialogue. "Nature abhors a long silence," Dr. Thomas assures us. "The use of truth is its communication," Miss Rukeyser concurs.

In his new book, a collection of essays originally appearing in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Thomas returns over and again to the theme of unity, finding connectedness to be the principle of living things:

The new phenomenon of cell fusion . . . is the most unbiologic of all

¹ THE LIVES OF A CELL: Notes of a Biology Watcher, by Lewis Thomas. Viking. \$6.95.

² THE LIFE OF POETRY, by Muriel Rukeyser. Morrow. \$2.95 paperback (reissue).

phenomena, violating the most fundamental myth of the last century for it denies the importance of specificity, integrity, and separateness in living things. Any cell—man, animal, fish, fowl, or insect—given the chance and under the right conditions, brought into contact with any other cell, however foreign, will fuse with it.

And Muriel Rukeyser, writing of art's consequence in American life, argues that poetry reveals the harmony of apparently conflicting ideas. For her, the principle of continuity rules the elements of a poem, governs human assemblage and links us with our time. "A poem," she writes, "is not its words or its images, any more than a symphony is its notes or a river its drops of water. Poetry depends on the moving relations within itself. It is an art that lives in time, expressing and evoking the moving relation between the individual consciousness and the world."

Central to both books is the imagery of dance. "We live in a dancing matrix of viruses," Thomas asserts, and Rukeyser compares the artist's juxtapositions to "the river meeting the sea in eternal relationship, in a dance of power, in a dance of love."

They are, of course, devoted to different kinds of unity: Lewis Thomas explores the resemblances of all forms of life, each connected to every other and obeying the same laws; Muriel Rukeyser affirms poetry's unifying power. There are, however, impressive areas of overlap. Dr. Thomas provides striking metaphors for poetry when he writes that we share with nearly all living things the urge to make music. His essay, "The Music of *This Sphere*," wakes the heart, for it is, in fact, a modern psalm in praise of song, celebrating the "joyful noise" of all creatures:

Somewhere, underlying all the other signals, is a continual music. . . . Gorillas beat their chests for certain kinds of discourse. Animals with loose skeletons rattle them, or, like rattlesnakes, get sounds from externally placed structures. Turtles, alligators, crocodiles, and even snakes make various more or less vocal sounds.

Nor does his explanation for the phenomenon diminish its grandeur. He writes: "The rhythmic sounds might be the recapitulation of something else—an earliest memory, a core for the transformation of inanimate, random matter in chaos into the improbable, ordered dance of living forms."

At times he probes the arts for extended analogies, as when he compares the development of words to the evolution of species, writing that language is alive, a great organism moved by cells that are words which fuse and then mate. On other occasions, he minimizes disciplinary frontiers just as he lessens divisions among beings; and informs on various levels. For example, he writes that our process of transferring verbal information is far less precise than other biologic systems for communication—and with good reason. He compares the manner in which we store information to the way lymphocytes are programmed through the receptors on their

surfaces to recognize alien substances in the tissues. Carrying through the analogy with the mind, Dr. Thomas writes that unlike memory, which can store diverse words and facts, each of the lymphocytes is programmed to recognize only a single molecule. Our minds are capable of creating ambiguity, on which language depends; lymphocytes, on the other hand, must be precise to avoid devastating consequences.

While the scientist's reasoning leads him to poetry, the poet's principles are drawn from science. Muriel Rukeyser asserts that understanding the truth of relationships allows us to live and create at a profound level, preventing us from falling into superficiality. According to Rukeyser, the human quest is not for truth as isolated phenomena but for the reality of relationships, a method she has learned from biology.

The poet's perception of truth is comparable, she believes, to the scientist's apprehension of facts not as isolated things but as phenomena that interact, feeding or destroying one another. Arguing for a "dynamics of poetry," she writes: "We know that the relationships in poetry are clearer when we think in terms of a dynamic system, whose tendencies toward equilibrium, and even toward entropy, are the same as other systems."

What emerged from my reading of both works was the staggering truth of unity, the conviction that all life is part of the same fabric. Together, the writers have a mysterious, insistent, latent voice murmuring, "ONE WORLD, ONE WORLD," that idea established and confirmed by the evidence of microbiology and the findings of criticism. In fact, their joint vision is so compelling that the words "science" and "poetry" seem too narrowly restrictive for truths they uncover.

Rukeyser emphasizes poetry's resolution of components; Thomas stresses that synchrony is the way of the world. To illustrate those beliefs, both draw on abundant examples from primitive cultures, linguistics, technology, history, anthropology and astronomy, among other fields. In discussing poetry as prophecy, Muriel Rukeyser remarks that subjugated American Indians of California in 1870 found they were dreaming of victory in patterns, and, losing all hope of victory, sang their dreams. And Lewis Thomas, speaking of how living things tend to join up and establish linkages, compares creatures of myth—the Sphinx, the Ch'i-lin of ancient China, the Centaur—to cells. The mythical animals and the cells are hybrid beings, made up of parts that are entirely familiar; both are mixtures of species. The phenomenon of distinct cells fusing becomes, by his witty analogy, "a Chimera, a Griffon, a Sphinx, a Ganesha, a Peruvian god, a Chi'i-lin, an omen of good fortune, a wish for the world."

At times the two authors seem to be writing one book, as when they speculate that the Western fear of death results from an inadequate understanding of its naturalness. Muriel Rukeyser suggests that Walt Whitman's view of life and death as a continuum came as a reaction to America's denial of death, a disavowal she calls "one of the deepest sources, in our culture, of the corruption of consciousness." And Lewis Thomas writes that the custom of dying in hospital secrecy may breed fear of the unfamiliar. When we think of the life of all life, a new picture may

emerge: death is never sudden, for cells descend in sequence, a process that takes hours or days. Besides, death is what we have in concert with everything that lives, he says: "Everything dies, all around, trees, plankton, lichens, mice, whales, flies, mitochondria. . . . Flies do not develop a ward round of diseases that carry them off, one by one. They simply age, and die, like flies."

Although Rukeyser and Thomas have the capacity to entertain various kinds of knowledge, they offer more striking insights in their own spheres. Muriel Rukeyser reasons that poetry invites a total response: the poet, capturing the reciprocal reality of diverse phenomena, provides a meeting place for our fragmented impressions.

While she writes persuasively of Dante's art of arrangement and Melville's urge to resolve conflicts, she is most inventive when exploring the lesser-known figures, such as James Gates Percival, "the lost poet of meeting places." Percival, a physician and geologist whose poems combined fields of thought, won attention from his nineteenth-century American contemporaries only for conventional, somewhat hackneyed, verses. More startling, however, are the uncelebrated poems that deal with the transcendent harmony of seemingly discordant data. She quotes *Prometheus*, a poem composed in 1822, which begins with a configuration of objects that confounds the mind—comet, star, insect, atom—then moves suddenly into light:

Truth stands before him in a full, clear blaze
An intellectual sunbeam . . .

And although he crosses cultural boundaries to find metaphors, Lewis Thomas writes most impressively of microbiology. Underlying his thesis about unity is his conviction that laws of cooperation govern species. He corrects a common misunderstanding, for example, when he mentions that the natural relationship between human beings and microbes is not destructive. In the rare instances when bacteria are harmful to us—usually by a freakish accident on their part—the effects are worse for them than for us. Contrary to popular belief, microbes are not our adversaries: "Disease usually results from inconclusive negotiations for symbiosis, an overstepping of the line by one side or the other, a biologic misinterpretation of borders."

Nor is humankind superior to other species. Dr. Thomas observes that our "human chauvinism" causes us to imagine we are detached from and above the rest of life, but that in fact science has destroyed that illusion. "We are shared, rented, occupied," he declares. "Man could not be man without mitochondria, centrioles, basal bodies," he writes, describing the organelles that live in our cells.

Organelles are probably remnants of primitive viruses and bacteria, but he refers to certain organelles, such as mitochondria, as creatures, because they control their own replication. He questions whether the body and the organelles, which carry out vital metabolic functions, can be described

accurately as having a master-slave arrangement. On the contrary, he points out that they live inside us and we, their true servants, have given them a free ride through evolutionary fires. Moreover, the organelles comprise our very being, providing our identity.

His thoughts about organelles call to my mind the generation of Victorian poets whose faith in the natural order was shaken by the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. If it troubled our literary ancestors to learn that man descended from the apes, it might have shattered them to realize that we *haven't* descended from more primitive forms of life: those ancient beings are as much ourselves as our eyes and our hearts.

Most important, he reminds us that we share identical organelles with all living beings. In fact, our organelles are indistinguishable from those of other creatures, probably because all earthly life derived from a single cell. Impassioned, he utters:

They feel like strangers, but the thought comes that the same creatures,
precisely the same, are out there in the cells of sea gulls, and whales,
and dune grass, and seaweed, and hermit crabs, and further inland in
the leaves of the beech in my backyard, and in the family of skunks
beneath the back fence, and even in that fly on the window. Through
them, I am connected; I have close relatives, once removed, all over the
place.

When writing of a common heritage, he soars and glides in passages like that one, which are reminiscent of *Leaves of Grass*:

The sharpfooted moose of the north, the cat on the housesill,
the chickadee, the prairie-dog,
the litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,
the brood of the turkeyhen, and she with her halfspread wings,
I see in them and myself the same old law.

Dr. Thomas recalls Whitman in his inspired enumeration of real things, and in his discovery of self through recognizing the uniformity of diverse beings. The microbiologist, however, extends the basis for connecting the self with other beings by divulging the role of organelles in that relationship. And in that sense, he is a realization of Whitman's prophecy, in the Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, that "there shall be love between the poet and the man of demonstrable science."

*

The combined wisdom of Muriel Rukeyser and Lewis Thomas provides one more indication that discoveries of truth have remarkable affinities, whether they occur in the arts or in the sciences. In many instances, the same truth has been revealed to various minds centuries apart, and applied to different concepts. Discoveries concerning the harmony of

opposites, for example, were applied by William Blake to the nature of life and by physicists to the nature of matter. Blake wrote, "Without Contraries is no Progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Existence." And on the same subject modern physicists, following the discoveries of Neils Bohr and Lord Rutherford, tell us that positively and negatively charged particles achieve a balance in all atoms and molecules, providing them with their structure.

So it is with two discoveries of the image and its relation to creative thought. Ezra Pound wrote, "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term 'complex' rather in the technical sense employed by the new psychologists, such as Hart. . . ." For Pound, the image was a dynamic, changing thing, in continuous motion. It was not simply a static description but the presentation—in light that moves, in darkness that comes on, in fruit that falls—of the person who sees or hears or touches the object.

If the concept was fundamental to modern poetry, it mattered to science as well, for Albert Einstein described a like process of thought in discussing his own manner of reasoning. In answer to a psychological survey of mathematicians, he wrote: "The words of the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The physical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be 'voluntarily' reproduced and combined."

Nor do the poet and the scientist differ in their methods of arriving at truth, despite the assertions of generations of Western educators who have urged dividing the arts from the sciences. The revelations of Blake and of the physicists depend, each in its own way, on an experience of knowledge as well as on an intellectual apprehension of a formula. Each supposes a moving process of realization. Each incorporates a dance of images, a wheel of connected contrasts. The reality of each truth is reciprocal, rather than dependent upon isolated facts.

To be sure, there are some essential differences in their processes of discovery. What the poet perceives as truth, the scientist must demonstrate. Then too, all scientific discoveries are built on a scaffolding of previous discoveries over time. In the example given above, Blake's revelation was oracular and is quoted, in fact, from one of the Prophetic Books, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In contrast, the discoveries of Bohr and Rutherford were built on Dalton's conclusions about the atomic nature of things. And they led, in turn, to studies by modern physicists concerning even smaller particles in atoms.

Nevertheless, I suspect that many important discoveries in science are based on revelation, even in our age when augury is hardly respectable. Reading *The Double Helix*,³ by Dr. James Watson, the molecular biologist,

³ *The Double Helix: Being a Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA* (New York, 1968).

I was struck by the revelatory way in which the structure of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) was discovered. In that compelling adventure story, Dr. Watson recounts how he and Dr. Crick tried to understand how the genetic code worked and to find a structure for all its properties. Finally, they hit upon that structure as a visual image: a double spring, or "helix." Indeed, they *saw* truth.

Further, all works of science and poetry exist in a fabric of time, a pull on one end exerting a change at the other. For example, modern immunologists have proven the validity and, in fact, interdependency of two nineteenth-century theories on the nature of immunity to microbial disease. Curiously, at the time of their formulation the theories were considered antithetical. Dr. Paul Ehrlich held that the body defends itself against infectious disease by means of the substance it makes called antibody. Dr. Eli Metchnikoff claimed that body resistance is effected by cells that become educated in fighting off microorganisms. Contemporary scientists have altered the theories, in effect, by proving both correct: they have transformed them from issues of debate to operative factors.

Poets, too, speak in a lively dialogue with the near and remote past. In John Berryman's *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, America's first poet is the object of Berryman's blazing passion. Just as her wholeness and integrity inspire the modern poet, his celebration of her illuminates certain qualities of her life and work. Although he praises her endurance and laments his own instability, his self-examination brings to light the Puritan poet's tendency to question the permanence of assertions:

I wist not what to wish, yet sure, thought I
 If so much excellence abide below
 How excellent is He that dwells on High,
 Whose power and beauty by his works we know.

That kind of reciprocity is found in the work of Marianne Moore, who said frequently that she wrote out of gratitude to books and people. In 1968 she told me, "You'll be reading the French poets, or Wallace Stevens, and you will be influenced. You will have a touch of it in what you write. And in your emotions." An instance of her interaction with the past is her early poem, "Those Various Scalpels," containing a series of epithets that embody a passionate but futile address to a cool beauty:

your hair, the tails of two
 fighting-cocks head to head in stone like sculptured
 scimitars re-
 peating the curve of your ears in reverse order:
 your eyes, flowers of ice and snow

In that poem, the modern writer evokes the similes in *The Song of Solomon*

("Thine eyes are as doves behind thy veil"), but makes it new by using ironic metaphors that objectify the speaker's passion and playful rebuke. And, using comparable methods, poets in our time use features of old models such as the riddle and the night chant just as scientists use aspects of the Mendelian laws, which they do not deny but simply understand in different ways because of the findings of modern geneticists.

Apart from resembling poetry in its methods and in the nature of its findings, science can amplify poetry's intuited truths; like mythology, science has an organizing power for ordering modern experience. If art reveals the unity of all things by synchronizing discordant parts, science supports that unity by enlarging the prospects. We learn from science that cooperation is the law of life at all levels, and that all beings get along by cooperating, accommodating, exchanging.

When he speculates that all beings are united, Dr. Thomas enlarges Muriel Rukeyser's belief in poetry's insistence on unity. And both statements provide a dynamic commentary on her *Waterlily Fire*, a sequence that intimates the connectedness of all people:

now
The bridges bind us in symbol, the sea
Is a bond, the sky reaches into our bodies.
We pray: we dive into each other's eyes.

And in Rukeyser's translation of *Sun Stone*, by Octavio Paz, the speaker finds his own individuality paradoxically by discovering what he shares with the other:

I am the other when I am myself, my acts
are more my own when they are everybody's
because to be myself I must be other

The theme occurs also in *Leaves of Grass*:

And I know that the hand of God is the
elderhand of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest
brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my
brothers

What science has given underscores the sacredness of every living thing. That emphasis is of supreme importance to the poet, who makes things new by transforming them into aspects of himself. In D. H. Lawrence's collection of poems, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, each of the creatures he presents is a blessed realization of what man must find in himself. And Muriel Rukeyser, whose poetry would reconstruct our way of seeing the world, writes of modern cruelty paradoxically in a way that forces up her praise of what is human. In "Rational Man," a section of her long

poem, *Breaking Open*, she enumerates those miseries and concludes: "Mercy, Lord. On every living life."

If the great poets have searched for unity of being, Lewis Thomas has magnified the idea of self by emphasizing that we live in and on one another. As he explored the self, Whitman observed the gradual emergence of unity: "I am of the old and the young . . . of the woman the same as of the man." In our time Lewis Thomas has rediscovered the self as a composition of mitochondria, basal bodies and centrioles, whose basic tendencies are to join up, whose hybrid nature constitutes hope for a divided world.

Most subtle and curious of all: Whitman, who wrote that "seeing, hearing and feeling are miracles," also predicted the artistic relevance of science: "Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet but always his encouragement and support." As if in fulfillment of that prophecy, Dr. Thomas offers his urgent, if dizzying, truth that we are one with all living beings. Moreover, that only by recognizing what we share with other organisms can we revere all forms of life—including our own.

Notes on Contributors (cont.)

ROBERT S. CLARK, THE HUDSON REVIEW's regular music critic, has recently become Executive Editor of *High Fidelity Magazine*.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE continues to work on Pindar, but also contemplates resuming work on an unfinished translation of The Four Gospels.

GRACE SCHULMAN's first collection of poems is forthcoming from Princeton University Press. Director of the Poetry Center, YM-YWHA, she is also Poetry Editor of *The Nation* and an Assistant Professor of English, Baruch College, CUNY.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

MARVIN MUDRICK

Chicken Little and the Two Nose-Jobs

ONCE UPON A TIME Professor Leavis noticed that the sky was falling, and ever since, for fifty years or more, he's been busy issuing clucks of alarm, instructions, flak suits, gas masks, and cases of Bovril to all English-speaking persons except the unspeakable Americans. This is quite his barmiest sandwich board yet.¹ If, he says, the sky is to be pushed back up, "if there is to be any hope of saving humanity from what threatens it," if "we" are to "revive 'the living intuitive faculty' [a term Leavis borrows from Lawrence, who borrowed it from Rod McKuen]," if "life, or the potency at the source of life" or "the nature of livingness in human life" or "the idea of spontaneity" is to be "guard[ed] . . . against reductive assumptions," if "a potent emergence" isn't to collapse "with pregnant brevity," if Leavis is to cut the cackle and stop venting such chicky-doo by the cubic yard, then there is no doubt that America will have to go:

America has long been menacing our future. . . . British capital and British "know-how" enabled America to develop a railroad network at great speed, and industrialism, a British invention, made inevitable the victory of the North in the Civil War. [The British also invented baseball.] There is still, nevertheless, a difference: we have suffered no such abrupt opening of an impassable gap between the present and the past as was entailed in the swift formation of the new immense, and supremely powerful, country. It is not credible that America could save itself; the *ahnung*, the memory, the faith, and the "living intuitive faculty" that must be appealed to in the initiation of the new kind of sustained creative effort can't be appealed to there.

The American language? "The idea that American English has . . . an obvious vital superiority over British English . . . needn't be discussed . . . : the criteria of 'superiority' that are implied lack interest." American writers?

The notion that the currently applauded American writers prove the vitality of the civilization that produced them is absurd—and significant. What, characteristically, they demonstrate, is a depressing, and often repellent, poverty in the range of experience, satisfaction and human potentiality they seem to know of, and to think all. As for the famed and flattered American critics who write about the "British-English" classics, they seem, judged by what they say about them, unable to read them. The "language" of heuristic thought that major literature depends on is too alien; it bears no relation to the human world they know, or to the kinds of intellectual apparatus they are familiar with and too practised in applying.

¹ THE LIVING PRINCIPLE, by F. R. Leavis. Oxford. \$12.95.

Americans, according to Leavis, haven't anything to say because they have no language to say it in. "The commercialized technologico-cultural manifestations of North America" represent the American language in its meanest and merely functional use; but even "serious" American writing is mechanical because the American language itself is irredeemably mechanical. On the other hand "British English" (Leavis's English) is as organic as a barnyard or a living intuitive faculty; "its literature is very rich" and represents "a subtle language in its fullest use." England has roots and loam, whereas neon America is crassly the up-to-the-minute extrusion of the instrumental heresy (the "Cartesian-Newtonian dualism"), which, if we (British) are to "exorcize" it from our potent and pregnant "Human World," will have to be unwinkingly opposed by "the distinctive discipline of thought that should characterize 'English.'" The components of this discipline are close reading and rigorous grading of literary texts, "for an account of how a poem exists is a pregnant hint of the way in which the Human World is created and, in constant renewal, maintained." Humanity's sole hope is—what else?—a good strong English major. God is love. The alternative to America is a Leavisian fuss-and-feathers "English School" off in the prelapsarian British boonies; here, "tests of perception and sensibility and exercises in judgment and analysis"—i.e. total lit-crit—are rapped out daily by the lads and lasses (under the potent rod of a living intuitive faculty member), who thereupon evolve not only "total communities" of affection and keen articulateness but desperate and unspeakable literary styles like this one:

For the problems—decidedly in the plural here—that present themselves in so formidable a way and so inexorably as practical ones involve tentativeness, incompleteness and compromise so inescapably that the ends ("the living principle") that, together with the *ahnung* implicit in them, should give the defects their meaning will be lost if practice is not associated with thought that renews and reformulates. By slipping in after "ends" that brief parenthetical phrase I meant to intimate that what one for this, for that or for the other directing purpose necessarily emphasizes as an end in view gets its full significance from a totality of apprehension and concern, and that the complex totality is a vital unity. It seems to me important to think of this kind of unity as hardly distinguishable from the principle that makes it *one*, "principle" here implying an energy that, representing a *nisus* that has maintained a creative continuity from human beginnings and goes back to the source, impels, directs and controls.

Leavis spends the last hundred pages or so of his book arguing—with the usual genuflections to the "major poet"—that *Four Quartets* is pretentiously, irrationally, and redundantly gloomy. It's an appropriate conclusion.

When Leavis animadverts on American critics, he probably isn't thinking of Frederick Crews (he has probably never heard of Crews, who has

come up in the last decade or so not too fast on the inside, with a breadth of opportunism that ranges from Freud and the deep secrets of literature to student uprisings and the imperialist bias of American professors); but Crews is echt-American Establishment (he throws an occasional tantrum, but he just wants attention), Crews pays his dues² (at 2 A. M. in the alley behind the building), Crews is a riot. Crews's emetic-peristaltic title³ is succeeded on the front of the jacket by a subtitle, *Psychoanalysis, Ideology, and Critical Method*, itself succeeded by a drawing that looks to an old inkblot aficionado like a veiny female crotch; and it's all downhill from there: "Hence the otherwise inexplicable feeling in Conrad that nautical duty and discipline and trial constitute a welcome respite from something more fearsome. In a word, that something is sexuality." In two words, Crews is fearless and programmed. The answers are already in the type-writer: many "hences," still more "preciselys" ("But Brown's appeal is precisely to those . . ."), numerous "quite simplys" ("because, quite simply, they are his own"). Automated transitional sentences bump into sight on little lead feet: "It should be noted . . ."; "Not surprisingly . . ."; "It is startling . . ."; "Paradoxically . . ."; "This is not to say . . ."; "This is not to say, of course, . . ."; "The very fact that . . ."; "For the truth is . . ."; for the reader knows where he stands with Crews, unafraid on the veiny mountain—

In such surroundings the threat of castration [for Conrad] from the two classic sources, the father's wrath and the mother's body, is relentless:

I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn't a quarry or a sandpit, anyhow. It was just a hole. . . .

"Conrad specialists," predicts Crews, will snort and fume at Crews's boldness. "Nothing is more repugnant to most literary scholars than the thought that their favorite author was prey to obscene wishes and worries." For the truth is precisely that Conrad imagined the maternal cavity as not only *vast* but, quite simply, *artificial*—that is, *man-made* on a grand (canyon) scale, hence made by the *head(phallus)-man*, the *father* who has blocked (and darkened) the son(sun). This is not to say, of course, that I am saying something.

But there is another dimension to this fiasco. *Out of My System* was, according to Crews, coughed up under interesting circumstances. Lying around the office were middens of yellowing offprints of essays he no longer believed one word of on fad topics that had died instantly at his touch. What to do? "Shouldn't the author, instead of making us relive his intellectual and political vicissitudes, have arrived at a consistent stand and straightforwardly expounded it?" Such "consistency," however, would have obliged him to type a whole new set of essays and watch them grow obsolete before he could even pull them out of the machine and mail them

² To the MLA.

³ *OUT OF MY SYSTEM*, by Frederick Crews. Oxford. \$10.00.

off to *PMLA* or *Partisan Review* or *The New York Review of Books*. The practical solution, then, was to assemble them "in order of composition" in a little mausoleum of a book ("an oblique case history of sorts"), "adding headnotes [N.B. the clever anagram for "headstone"] that point to unsolved problems and shifts of attitude." Thus Crews can eat his crow and—as the title indicates—regurgitate it too.

During those bracing days Crews seems to have carried with him an uninterrupted flared pair of nostrils: "The hallmark of most criticism produced today [i.e. yesterday] is precisely [sic] its low degree of commitment, its air of occupying a niche rather than of claiming some territory. The niche is the one where most of us reside [he was lecturing a crowd of MLA members, who must have been thrilled to find themselves eye to eye with the resident incendiary]—the affluent and multifarious university, the crowning ornament of a credit-card civilization whose basis cannot be examined [by Mao? Abbie Hoffman? Ronald Reagan?] with a clear conscience." ("If my tone here is sometimes taunting," says today's headnote to this essay, "my aim is the traditionally scholarly one of trying to combat intellectual prejudice." You bet.) But his "anguish" over Vietnam demanded action (by *somebody*), and he rallied the student protesters by pointedly observing that "polite and patient reformism may be out of place in certain cases," that "the most durable liberal illusion is that violence never pays." Today, though: "Like many others who were caught between antiwar sentiment, concern [!] for the besieged universities, and sympathy for excluded blacks," recalls the smarmy and carefully irrelevant headstone, "I was trying—with only partial success, I now see—to marshal ideas against a sense of helpless bewilderment." What a time it was! when assistant professors could cut classes to play Trotsky at the Winter Palace if not Joan at the stake.

Crews's fervor cooled a bit when one of the academic leaders of the Movement, Professor Louis Kampf, went so far as to propose not only a physical but a physiological assault on the very citadel of bourgeois culture, Lincoln Center: "Not a performance should go by without disruption. The fountains should be dried with calcium chloride, the statuary pissed on, the walls smeared with shit." Kampf—"Mein" to his friends?—soon after became president of the Modern Language Association (as the result of an unprecedented leftist putsch, however; probably very few MLA presidents would like to smear the walls of Lincoln Center with shit); and Crews must have begun to worry that some of these jokers really *meant* it. At any rate, having eased Freud and Marx out of his system and smeared the walls with the product, he feels free as a feather in the breeze; Oxford University Press has published its first self-canceling book; and Crews's next will be a collection of early essays, among them "What I Did on My Summer Vacation" and "What I Want to Be When I Grow Up," with notes and objections by the author.

Crews has no trouble leaving behind him such total explainers of human relations as Marx and Freud because, sooner or later, any lit-prof can take his stand on the autonomy of art or—if his own delusions turn total and messianic—on the supremacy of art and the apocalyptic indispensability

of close reading. John Murray Cuddihy, though, is a sociologist, professionally an explainer of men in society, and therefore in no position to ignore the two brashest and most influential of the Western World's explainers. What he decides to do is get back at, and back *of*, those obstinate colossi who before it had even been invented made sociology seem such small potatoes. His strategy is to hoist them by their own petard: to offer an explanation of the explainers that, using on them the same trick they themselves used on their opposition, discredits them in advance and explains them away. Marx and Freud built into their theses the *ad hominem* presumption that whoever disagrees is demonstrating only his personal need to resist the clear, comprehensive, and shocking truth; and Cuddihy, building the same presumption into his own thesis,⁴ has (as he might say) the chutzpah to surround the surrounders.

The thesis begins as a statement of fact: Marx and Freud were Jews. The rest of it is more questionable: that being Jewish is not so innocent as it appears to be; that (speaking frankly) Jews are primitive and vengeful, and resent "the beauty of the West"; that everything Marx and Freud said was totally determined by their Jewishness; that their pretense of exposing unpalatable truths about mankind was in reality a paranoid way of bullying sentimental Gentiles into feeling guilty about the prevalence of anti-Semitism—which Cuddihy sees as a civilized reaction to Jewish "vulgarity"—and the failure of Jewish assimilation in Europe; that those who accept the thesis are self-evidently paragons of good sense whereas those who reject or question it are self-evidently paranoid Jews (cf. the thesis) or sentimental Gentiles (cf. the thesis) and so prove it beyond a doubt. Obviously Freud owes everything to his hatred and incomprehension of the Gentiles. For example, according to Cuddihy, the father-hatred aspect of the Oedipus complex is Freud's rationalization of "the heretofore undisclosed source of the Oedipus complex," an incident in Freud's childhood when he saw his father humiliated in the street by an anti-Semitic Gentile; the Oedipal "lust for the mother" is Freud's rationalization of "the deepest taboo of Judaism, the taboo against intermarriage [Cuddihy must have attended a revival of *Abie's Irish Rose* and walked out before the happy ending], the forbidden lust of the Jew for the Gentile *shiksa* [a tenebrous figure who is even more forbidden than the Jewish *shiksa*]." Freud's view of "repression" derives from his "tribal" Jewish incapacity to understand the European idea of *privacy*:

In the nineteenth century, Eastern European Jewry enters the West and commits a stupendous "category mistake": systematically, it mistakes privacy for secrecy. Because, in the *Gemeinschaft* of their past, "privacy is neither known nor desired," the many ways in which European bourgeois culture managed to institutionalize the need to be *private in public*—the "decencies," the decorum of public behavior in public places, yes, alas, "respectability"—all this is lost on the Jewish intelligentsia of the nineteenth century. To them, it appears as so much hypocrisy. Insistently, they moralize it. . . .

* THE ORDEAL OF CIVILITY, by John Murray Cuddihy. Basic Books. \$11.95.

Freud's pretense or conviction (Cuddihy can never make up his mind whether he would like Freud to appear demonic or stupid) that he is exposing the repressed sexual impulses below the conscious and civil surface of social behavior bears no relation to the facts, it merely rationalizes his urge to make the Gentiles seem as fundamentally unmannerly and disorderly to themselves as his unemancipated Eastern European brethren seem to him. The Freudian slip is a mirage: what Freud exposes through the rent (which he himself makes) in the garment of Gentile civility is only the tatty overcoat of Jewish self-righteousness. Freud (or Marx, or nowadays Lévi-Strauss) is the post-Biblical champion of his (in Cuddihy's words) "backward" and "barbarous" people, bringing the Gentiles low (as low as the Jews), contemptuous of their effort to recruit and assimilate him since they would still leave all the other Jews (and the Jew in him) out there swinging among the immemorial trees:

After a visit from Eugen Bleuler, professor of psychiatry at the University of Zurich, and his wife, who spend a Friday evening with the Freuds, Freud writes that they both were "very kind, insofar as his unapproachability and her affectation permit. . . . They both tried to take me by storm and persuade me that I should not *talk* of 'sexuality,' but should find *another name* for what does not coincide with sexuality in the popular sense. All resistance and misunderstanding would then cease. I replied," Freud writes Abraham, "that I had no use for such household remedies" (my emphasis). It is all there: the bourgeois, polite, social formality ("his unapproachability"), the hypocrisy ("her affectation"), the attempt of the bourgeois Gentile to "bribe" him to clean up his coarse language and settle on a polite euphemism for his "coarse Galatea," sexuality. This *Ostjude* would not convert (i.e., refine). He would remain unhousebroken. . . . I am absolutely convinced, using all the *Verstehen* I can corral, that Freud experienced this visit and Bleuler's proposal as an invitation to a "sell-out," that he experienced it subjectively as an act of proselytization—religious proselytization: they were offering to perform rhinoplastic surgery on his id (the "sexuality" he discovered behind symptoms). What he *heard* from those awfully "kind" *goyim* was: "Only change your name, and we'll accept you. Let us do a nose-job on you, then we'll accept you [i.e., your id theory, your "Yid"]—please, that's all we ask, and it isn't much, really, is it? [square brackets Cuddihy's]

Whereupon, using all the *Verstehen* that I can corral, and trying to repress a limerick on the id-Yid jingle (which Cuddihy is so mad about that he scatters it through his text like punctuation, though—as Robert Alter noted in his review in *Commentary*—it didn't rhyme for Freud: "id" translates Freud's "*das Es*"), I take a deep breath and summarize Cuddihy on Freud: Just as Marx stands Hegel on his head, so Cuddihy stands Freud on his nose. Behind sexual appearance is Jewish fact. Screw means Jew.

That's Cuddihy on weekdays. On Sundays he takes the warm, human tour of the model *shtetl* in the South Bronx where the movie cast of *Fiddler on the Roof* dances the *hora* every hour on the hour. On Saturday nights he

wonders whether all the time something *was* down there in the bilge that everybody knew all about, but, until Freud came slouching in, would anybody have been crude enough (Cuddihy's Jew, Leavis's American) to put a label on it and set it out in Macy's window? "What was the inner thrust of psychoanalysis: to *cherchez les faits*? or to *épatez les bourgeois*?"—the "English" and "French" are Cuddihy's:

... the problem recurs: what has been discovered here? Wherein lies Freud's originality? In his scientific contribution as a theorist or in his social location as a Jew? Has he discovered a hitherto unknown sexuality and aggression beneath the civil surface of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*? Or does his originality lie precisely in his vulgarity? in his committing the indiscretion—for those not "bound to discretion," like Jews and other social pariahs—of *speaking* the unspeakable truths that all *goyim* already latently know are so? ...

If, in the natural sciences, as Whitehead has said, "everything of importance has been said before by someone who did not discover it," perhaps in the social sciences everything of importance has been discovered before by someone who did not say it. The roots of Freud's "anxiety of influence" run deep. Priority in the social sciences, like creativity in the humanities, may be as much a matter of naming as of knowing. "The commodity in which poets deal, their authority, their property," Harold Bloom writes, "turns upon priority. They own, they are, what they become first in naming."⁵

Still another problem that must have vexed Cuddihy, though he never brings it up (out of his system): How in the world did these self-deceived and spiteful Jews succeed in finding so many gullible Gentiles⁶ (since it seems unlikely that Cuddihy will find as many gullible Jews)? Freud is the main target. Cuddihy has a much shorter go at Marx, little more than an appendix on Lévi-Strauss, and some lucubrations on Jewish intellectuals in twentieth-century America. The book is so clumsily and ambiguously argued, so maddeningly repetitive, and so wretchedly written—sociologese varied by ordinary bonehead miscalculations—that it will probably be around for a while. Unless the sky falls.

⁵ Cuddihy has a footnote: "The source of this quotation, Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* ... is a brilliant book. Read it. In Bloom, modernist poetry finds its Malraux." But wherein lies Bloom's originality? Has he discovered a hitherto unknown commodity beneath the silver service of *l'art poétique*? Or does (as I would like you to believe) his originality lie precisely in his vulgarity? And just exactly who is Malraux?

⁶ Not all the Gentiles were taken in, and, among those who weren't, some decided to teach the Jews a lesson they would never forget; but Cuddihy is too civil to bring *that* up. Except for an appearance by Jerry Rubin of the Chicago Seven, who calls Judge Hoffman "Julius Hitler," Cuddihy would have managed a post-Auschwitz book on the Jews without mentioning Hitler; as for "the Holocaust," by that or any other name it isn't listed in the Index (which has twenty-three citations for "id-Yid") or discussed in the text. Instead—purist to the Jews' last ditch—Cuddihy carries on about "the hypocritical politeness which surrounded the Jewish question in all respectable quarters." He is quoting Hannah Arendt, another theorizer who had trouble figuring out why Jews might have preferred the respectable Gentiles' hypocrisy, or even their own tribal backwardness, to Hitler's uncompromising candor.

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Novel Auguries

SINCE MY CHRONICLES usually open with feeble novels and work up to the real thing, it may be salutary to reverse procedure and start with the book which most delighted and surprised me this quarter. I refer to Paul Theroux's latest fiction, not officially a fiction but a record of his train bash from Victoria Station through Turkey, Iran, Kuala Lumpur, Japan, Siberia and home again (I am compressing) jiggety jog.¹ What makes it more than a "record" and justifies its inclusion here is that Theroux's subtly thoughtful book explicitly considers its status as a piece of writing, and makes out of that consideration a splendid conclusion to what otherwise might have run down wearily at about page 267. Its Library of Congress card reads "Description and travel"; here is some description of travel in Teheran, "a boom town grafted onto a village . . . a place of no antiquity and little interest, unless one has a particular fascination for bad driving and a traffic situation twenty times worse than New York's." Theroux finds it more than a bit like Dallas, especially the Caspien Hotel Bar where are found "tall Americans lounging on sofas drinking Tuborg straight from the bottle" while another holds forth at the bar:

"I go up to the son of a bitch and say, 'X-ray them welds,' and he just looks at me kind of dumb. Ain't been no X-raying here for three weeks. Whole goddamned thang gonna fall down sure as anything."

He assures the audience he can go "back to Saudi any old time I want." The natives on the other hand aren't all that much on the other hand. Consider the following exchange between tourist "Paul" in Lahore, sallying out for a beer or perhaps a game of snooker and encountering from behind a tree your perfect thin-faced resident in striped pajamas:

"What are you looking for?"

"A drink."

"I get you a nice girl. Two hundred rupees. Good fucking." He said this with no more emotion than a man hawking razor blades.

"No thanks."

"Very young. You come with me. Good fucking."

"And good fucking to you," I said. "I'm looking for a drink."

Faced with such disarming wit, prudence, or stubbornness, the man in striped pajamas eventually breathes—"Take me."

Still it's not mainly satire at the Americans' or the natives' expense, even

¹ THE GREAT RAILWAY BAZAAR, by Paul Theroux. Houghton Mifflin. \$10.00.

when Paul rides the Sunbeam express from Tokyo to Kyoto, dutifully reading a Japanese novel while his Japanese seat companion is having a go at none other than *The Golden Bowl*. He decides to confront this representative of the mysterious East:

"I see you're reading Henry James."

The man laughed.

"I find the later James evasive," I said.

"Hard to understand?"

"No, not hard to understand—just evasive."

"You can take my course!"

"Do you give a course on James?"

"Well, I call the course simply '*The Golden Bowl*'."

"It sounds ambitious," I said. "How long does it take your average student to read *The Golden Bowl*?"

"The course lasts two years."

"Which other books do they read?"

"Just that one."

"Good God! How many lectures do you give?"

He did a little arithmetic, using his fingertips, then said, "About twenty lectures a year. That would make forty lectures altogether."

Somehow I learned a great deal about Japan from this exchange.

As Paul turns homeward, his only aides Kipling and Twain and Browning and *New Grub Street*, a bit of gin here, bottles of beer there, hardly a lungful of opium anywhere, one marvels at the writer's unfailing resources—comic and ironic still, though just barely. For at about two-thirds of the way through the book you realize that Paul the traveller is wearied of it all, finds Japan and Siberia not the best of all possible places to be, and eventually rocks across Asia-Europe and back to Victoria in *alternating states of grimness and catatonia*. What he learns is "what I had always secretly believed, that the difference between travel writing and fiction is the difference between recording what the eye sees and discovering what the imagination knows. Fiction is pure joy—how sad that I could not reinvent the trip as fiction." But no, not really sad at all for us, especially since so much of what the eye sees is made over by Theroux's writing into what the imagination knows, such as the imagining, on this reader's part, of what it is like to cross from somewhere *east of Siberia* (!)—the Soviet Far East—into mere Siberia itself and that much closer to Victoria. Reading *New Grub Street*, he passes "the yachtlike snowplows at Zima; the ochreous flare of the floodlit factory chimneys at Irkutsk; the sight of Marinsk in early morning . . . something terrible in that combination of cold, dark, and little people tripping over Siberian tracks." There is a never-to-be-recovered book from my own childhood named *Exiled to Siberia* which I read countless times; now Theroux's bring back Irkutsk to me. A wonderful book, even though a bestseller; taken together with his last novel, *The Black House*, it establishes Paul Theroux as just about the most interesting young writer around.

Theroux's pamphlet on V.S. Naipaul, plus his laudatory review of Naipaul's new novel, make me feel uneasy about expressing anything less than gratitude for what is a fully-rendered intelligent book of real substance.² If, as Orwell tells us, good prose is like a window pane, then Naipaul's writing encourages one to believe that a world of relationships, public and private, can be sighted through the novel's words; and nobody is likely to be less than respectful towards his career as novelist, historian and essayist. Yet determined as I was to like and admire *Guerrillas* it didn't quite work out that way, perhaps for reasons attributable to the defects of my own political character. It may partly have been that my reading of it followed too closely upon a rereading of *Under Western Eyes*, but what I missed in Naipaul's novel about political and personal unrest on a small island in the Caribbean (I avoid a plot summary) was the ironic hand of the novelist at his job of evaluating and devaluating.

This is not in the least to suggest that he is over-protective towards or taken in by his characters; if anything he is all too ruthlessly clear-eyed about their limitations, emptinesses, lack of anything like fully human response to things. But on the page these characters are never subjected to more than toneless, "objective" presentation by their creator, both within their own minds and in relationship to one another. In their different ways the main characters—a trouble-shooting white man on the side of enlightenment but not revolution, his soon-disaffected mistress swimming in bitterness and despair, the third-world organizer James Ahmed ("Everybody wants to fight his own little war. Everybody is a guerrilla") deep in sex and race hatred—are all accepted by the novelist and thus placed beyond the realm of any possible moral or aesthetic judgment on the reader's part.

So things "inexorably" wind their way towards disaster, exposure, degradation and death; but not very much of this takes place at the reader's expense, involving him strongly. Whereas in *Under Western Eyes* (an extreme and distinguished example, granted, of the political novel) not only the characters, the reader, and indeed Conrad himself (who collapsed after finishing it) are put on the rack of torturous ambiguity, concealment and false revelation, it is possible to read *Guerrillas* without much sympathetic suffering or even troublesome uncertainty about the meanings of events. For me this meant that the story—What Happens Next—was not a matter of great concern, and that while admiring the powerful accuracy with which individual scenes and moments were laid out, I was not driven to look forward or back. The novelist's will, his knowledge that these characters can't possibly have enough waywardness or humor or uncontrollable life to break through his own plans for them, makes for a rigid and not attractive enough tale, in the way even the grimmest most unillusioned chronicle of the deceptions of human politics must still be attractive. Still, *Guerrillas* is beyond the achievement of most contemporary novelists.

² GUERRILLAS, by V. S. Naipaul. Knopf. \$7.95.

It's not always you get two novels by well-known writers, each so silly or revolting in its individual way that you want to establish and divide between them the prize for the quarter's most sick-making contribution.³ After debating long and hard, as between George Macbeth and Jerzy Kosinski, I awarded the prize (too unmentionable to be described in these pages) to Kosinski on the grounds that he probably thinks he is serious. After all, Macbeth's "novel" is called "an entertainment," and who would not be rolling in the aisles by chapter 3, "The Hour of the Hare," when

At each repetition of the word wash, she forced her body energetically up against the dog's as his hard slender pink organ entered her vagina. It took about seventeen strokes, her breath coming in short heavy gasps, while she struggled to support her weight and keep the dog inside her. At the last, feeling Alexis start to shudder into his climax, she clutched herself convulsively to him and dragged them by sheer strength over and into the water. She came to her orgasm as they sank together into splashing darkness.

Not a pet-lover, I looked up Empson's chapter on the English dog, then tried to figure out Macbeth's water symbolism, noting that later on came a chapter called "The Hour of the Dog" (just preceding "The Hour of the Wild Boar"). There must be something Japanese about it all which Paul Theroux hadn't prepared me for, even though our English heroine, Cadbury, after the above grapple in (not the sea) the tub, confides to her Alexis that it's a dog's life. George Macbeth was born in Scotland, has written twenty books, is infamous for his drippily fang-toothed poetry; this is a chance for American readers, helped along by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, to really get involved with a contemporary phenomenon priced at \$6.95.

But Macbeth is merely a sex—or is it true love?—snob. In order to get more truly repellent experience courtesy of the novelist's words one needs Jerzy Kosinski, the poor man's Roman Polanski. Ten years ago when people still read books, one's students were rumored to be reading an exciting one called *The Painted Bird*. Predating the coming of classics-to-be like Hesse and Vonnegut, Kosinski now outdoes them in his latest cockpit of a book. It has a beautiful dedication and an author's note assuring us that the book is "wholly fiction." Which is reassuring to hear, since otherwise you might think that the author was a sicknik. Just remember, as you hear about the narrator's early life, that he's only a *persona*:

I have only one memory of another nanny, a Swiss girl who began working for my parents when I was three. One evening after she had been with us about a year, I stole a pair of scissors from her work box. Later, when she sat me on her lap and hugged me close, I plunged the

³ THE SAMURAI, by George Macbeth. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$6.95. COCKPIT, by Jerzy Kosinski. Houghton Mifflin. \$8.95.

scissors into her right breast. Her face became contorted, and she screamed, watching her white blouse turn red. . . .

A few months later, I dropped a large earthenware flowerpot from the window of our fifth-floor apartment onto a five-year-old boy who had broken one of my favorite toys. It missed him, but a shard from the pot flew up into his face and badly lacerated his eye. . . .

Sure enough, in later life this creep is up to the same tricks, like hiring derelicts to rape his beloved Veronica: "Their bodies were covered with lesions and carbuncles. They all appeared to be middle-aged"—but no, I can't go on. All of this is written in Kosinski's best English prose, without a flicker of tone throughout, and I have merely scratched the surface of some messy depths indeed. Congratulate Houghton-Mifflin for this offering, appropriate perhaps to the latter days of U.S. empery. Remember also that Kosinski has been "Professor of English Prose at Wesleyan, Princeton and Yale universities, his books translated into 'most major languages,' and is President of the American Center of P.E.N." Somehow, somebody up there is having us on, successfully.

While thus occupied with the bizarre and trivial, mention should be made of James Kirkwood⁴ who has previously given us gravely-titled modernist classics like *There Must Be a Pony!* and *P.S. Your Cat Is Dead!* Mr. Kirkwood, an actor and entertainer, is co-author of the book for the smash new musical *A Chorus Line*. Could he then be an interesting novelist as well? Raymond Sokolov didn't think so, reviewed his latest harshly, only to be taken to task by publicity-minded Kirkwood who proceeded to take out an ad mourning the demise of Sokolov. But the word from here is that Sokolov, alive and well, was also 100 percent correct, and that the toils and tribulations of Kirkwood's returned-from-Vietnam P.O.W. (mostly sexual tribulations—he met a swell male lover over there and now, back home, his marriage breaks up and so does he) add up to the "shapeless, artless saga" Sokolov correctly called it. On the other hand both Tom Tryon and Rex Reed liked it a lot; it caused Rex to "get a choke in my throat" and he assures us that "It will make a wonderful movie." No doubt. Readers of this periodical should know that James Kirkwood is at work on his fifth novel and lives in East Hampton, N.Y. with his cat named—Bobby Seale, of course.

Double Fault is an academic-and-marriage novel written from the wife's point of view, even though the husband gets his narrative chance.⁵ An academic herself, moving back into teaching and writing after child-bearing, Leah is married to Charles Middlebrook, the latter a bit of a drag the way academic husbands sometimes turn out to be when seen through by their novelist-wives. It may be (I can't really say) that academic husbands *are* in fact a drag. But this one has frequent spells of dizziness, chest pains, a very bad stomach, and his wife feels desperate, living life out in less than splendor:

⁴ SOME KIND OF HERO, by James Kirkwood. Thomas Y. Crowell. \$8.95.

⁵ DOUBLE FAULT, by Judith Chernaik. G. P. Putnam's. \$7.95.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, I am assaulted by the boredom of this town and of my halfhearted attempts to make a dent in it, wanting with almost a physical hunger to be living in London and New York. There is no urban life here, no matter how one pretends. Bicycling across the heart of the city, after my interview with the dean, I saw no one but construction workers and a few students, clean, empty streets. I have almost forgotten what it is to be smart and cynical. The earnest conversations one overhears in the coffee shops, between middle-aged women, among students, small groups of teachers—worst of all the teachers, their endless discussions of students, what students want or need or don't want, their comprehensive explanations of how they contrive or don't contrive to teach. When I let myself go, I hear myself (at thirty-five) as an *enfant terrible*, appalling—literally casting a pall over.

That fine sentence about almost forgetting what it is to be smart and cynical typifies Judith Chernaik's aggressive and humorous intelligence which is seen at work throughout the novel, as in this paragraph with its wholly justified evocation of academic earnestness and its endless blah-blah. Point is that Chernaik, herself an American and a lecturer in English at the University of London, knows whereof she speaks. The book's story isn't really very important, or rather is simply a peg on which to hang crisp observation, some good fighting exchanges between husband and wife (she flees to New York, tries a spot of adultery after which complications ensue) and a generally attractive spirit. Judith Chernaik is a good reviewer, author of a book on Shelley's lyrics, and I hope that *Double Fault*, an excellent sleeper of a first novel, will be followed by more.

Disturbing the Peace is as good as its title, beginning with the hero, John Wilder, committed to the alcoholic ward of Bellevue just at the onset of the long Labor Day weekend.⁶ Wilder, back from a business trip to Chicago (he works for a distilling company) and a week of insomnia and heavy drinking, suddenly finds himself in deep trouble and is persuaded by a mutual friend of his and his wife's to enter the hospital. You expect lost-weekend nightmares and sadistic keepers, but the stay in Bellevue is brilliantly managed, funny and horrible by turns, complexities of caring and despair seen from the inside. Any one who has read Richard Yates's first novel, *Revolutionary Road* (1961)—and if you have it's time to read it again—knows him to be a master at dramatizing how things go wrong in American marriages, how with the best of intentions people, particularly men, destroy what they've built, extending themselves through fantasies of liquor and sex into crazy versions of people for whom things go wrong and wronger. Yates's writing, so close to the banal, is in fact rivetting in the extreme, to the extent where you ask yourself whether anything this compulsively readable mustn't be slick rather than art.

Maybe it's both. In the excellent young literary magazine *Ploughshares* (vol. I, no. 3) Yates admitted, in a good interview, that his first drafts read

*DISTURBING THE PEACE, by Richard Yates. Delacorte Press. \$7.95.

like soap operas and that he revises and revises in order to "Get deep enough into it to bring it off." But the soap-opera base is still there, providing a firm one on which to proceed and perhaps accounting for Yates's spellbinding. One could open the book just about anywhere and find description and dialogue wholly authentic in rhythm and diction; here is the beginning of chapter 3 when after getting out of hospital Wilder, Janice and son Tommy head for a few days in the country:

What the Wilders called "the country" was a clapboard bungalow on half an acre of ground, fifty miles up the west bank of the Hudson. It would have been exposed to a great many other bungalows except for the dense shrubbery and trees shielding it on three sides and a high rustic fence along the fourth—that gave it the seclusion they prized, and there was a small lake for swimming close by.

But the best and most bracing part of the country was getting there: The trip across the George Washington Bridge and the long pastoral ride up the divided highway. As with certain other family pleasures, expectation topped fulfillment.

"... I think this is my favorite time of year," Janice was saying, "when it's just beginning to get fresh and cool again. Oh, I suppose it'll be even nicer in a few more weeks when the leaves really turn—all those lovely yellows and oranges and reds and browns—but even so, this is marvelous."

"Mm," he said. She had done a great deal of talking since he came home from Bellevue yesterday—most of it serving no purpose except to fill silence—and he knew that was because he'd said so little himself: he had mostly drunk bourbon and looked out of windows, or sat blinking in bewilderment along the shelves upon shelves of tightly packed books. "Well," he said now, doing his best, "it'll sure feel great just to lie on a blanket in the grass."

Sure enough it doesn't. Even a game of catch with his son quickly goes sour: "Well over half of Tommy's throws were wild and sent his father racing breathlessly over the grass or down on all fours under the bushes, where twigs whipped his face and mud soaked the knees of his clean chino pants. Once a pine needle stabbed him in the eye." Little he sees in nature or in the family that is his; next day he cuts out, back to New York and trouble. Even if one feels Yates has a problem about how to end a disaster-chronicle like this one, the achievement, the writing page-by-page, is high enough to make it not matter much. One hopes we will begin to be more grateful for American writers like him: if you can't be Pynchon why try to be second best? Richard Yates works superbly within the limits of his strength.

I propose now to comment on three American novels, monsters rather, which acknowledge no limits.⁷ Taken together they amount to a page-

⁷ THE SURFACE OF EARTH, by *Reynolds Price*. Atheneum. \$10.95. JR. by *William Gaddis*. Knopf. \$15.00. BEYOND THE BEDROOM WALL, by *Larry Woiwode*. Farrar Straus & Giroux. \$12.50.

count of 1836 and in each case the pages are large ones. I have not read all these pages with equal attention, indeed have not read all these pages; if this is the cardinal sin for a fiction reviewer then you are free to discount my opinions. I would only invoke something called Reader's Rights, even American readers who are used to have blockbusters hurled at them and are now waiting to see if Mailer's next will outdo Pynchon's last.

"This long, beautifully-written novel of the South . . . concerns the Kendals and the Mayfields, three generations of them", says *Publishers Weekly* about Reynolds Price's new one, summing up perfectly everything there is to be said against it. Mainly the beautiful writing:

Forrest Mayfield was drowning in gratitude, kneeling above his wife, taking the last of what she freely offered—the sight of her body in morning light laid safely beside him on linen marked only by proofs of their love. Till half an hour ago, at dawn, he had never seen more of her than head and arms—what showed to the world at the limits of her clothes. So he'd loved her because of her face and her kindness, the mysterious rein she accepted from the first on his oldest need—free flight outward from his own strapped and drying heart, that he be permitted after decades of hoarding to choose one willing girl and love her entirely the remainder of his life. . . . Now she was here—by her own will, unforced, still offering (though the room had filled with light) her entire brilliant body, perfect beyond any dream or guess and visibly threaded with the narrow blue channels that pulsed on, warm from their first full juncture.

What a juncture it must have been to command such angelic prose! Awhile later, his willing wife willingly pregnant, old Forrest still has a hankering, is desisting because of "the doctor's ban" on such activities, but when she, holds out her arms to him,

He went. And slowly, carefully found that the ban was as useless to her as himself. Useless and needless. Every entrance was free; every channel conductive to the center of joy that had waited in darkness but blossomed enormous and rank in their sight now. So, bare in the cold, oiled with their sweat, they strove all night round their swelling child who rocked with their laughter. Or they slept at intervals to wake to themselves. Once he, once her. Their lovely self, young and savable. Equal in gifts. Christmas of the heart.

Only page 25, yet you would expect a Southern Christ-child to be born out of this curious activity (I surely wouldn't call it sexual activity, not in that prose). There may be, as has been claimed, 'A "Faulknerian quality" about all this, but not Faulkner's good quality—his ribaldry and antic extravagance. Reynolds Price is instead the perfect young Creative Writer, chock full of reverence and gratitude, always gratitude. Best to read him alternatively with *The Essential Lenny Bruce* and see who wins out.

Of course Bruce is now talked about as if he were the first fellow to cut

through the hypocrisy of American Civilization, rather than a ruthlessly clever entertainer with a gift for words. And I suppose somebody will be convinced that the line Tony Tanner took about William Gaddis' earlier novel, *The Recognitions*, is appropriate to *JR* as well: "The problem of authenticity in all its forms is already with us, and in reading this extraordinary book we are constantly forced into recognition—re-cognitions—of many aspects of the problem, which have deteriorated into non-cognitions in our mass-media age." Gaddis' new novel has already been spoken of as if it tells us deep things about our mass-media civilization; whether so or not, it is perhaps one of those American novels which, like *The Recognitions* and *Giles Goat-Boy* and maybe even *V* (though not *Gravity's Rainbow*) bids for the category of Unreadable Masterpiece. Which may be to say no more than that I was unable (as with *Giles Goat-Boy*) to finish the book, and might not have gotten as far as I did (p. 507) if it weren't for the pressures of this review.

Gaddis' book is 726 pages without a break—chapter or space—and written in that high-styled modernist fuck-all-you-readers-who-can't-make-the-grade manner. By page 500 a reader has gotten the point, which is to put a lot of voices babbling together, switch from one conversation to another with a minimum of telegraphing, while making the individual voices as fragmented, incoherent and generally mucked-up as possible. That there are occasional locations like a high school, business office, subway or city apartment makes no significant difference to the real work of the book, and any talk about "character" or "story" is quite irrelevant. I would guess that Gaddis himself would only smile benignly if someone tried to engage him at the level of plot-character talk, since he is nothing if not a highly artful and obsessed writer. Though I never laughed aloud (working too hard to stay afloat for that) I can see the virtues of a sequence like the following one, excerpted from a text I realize it is folly ever to excerpt from since it is ALL ONE. Here anyway are David and Marian in a moment of domestic concern:

—Marian I, why don't you ever make lists? And when you go shopping, milk, you know we'll need milk . . . He had the refrigerator open pushing things aside, looking,—and why are you keeping this gravy left from the veal, we . . .

—Well just look at it! She'd turned behind him for the ketchup spattered plate.—How much food can I stock in that refrigerator? How can I make lists and shop a week ahead with a refrigerator that size?

—All right, with the one in the new house you can shop for a month, he went on stooped, pushing things aside, looking,—don't see any butter.

—Get some when you go down then, she said scraping clots of bean over the scotch bottle upended in the trash.

—I didn't know there was more asparagus at dinner last night, I would have . . . what's this, lamb chops?

—I got them for dinner.

- Three ninety-six for three lamb chops?
 —I can only eat one, I thought . . .
 —But three ninety-six, what would . . .
 —I thought they looked good, I was hungry when I went shopping and . . .
 —If you go shopping when you're hungry you always spend . . .
 —Well what should I do! Come up for rare beef at The Palm? instead of sharing David's chicken noodle soup and finishing his peanut butter sandwich?
 —All right! Would you like to have been there today like I was? Making stupid conversation with a grinning Chinese who's chewing up slices of his nine dollar steak and blowing them out on his plate? tells me his doctor says he can't digest the meat but he needs its juices so he patiently chews the whole God damned thing bite by bite and blows every one of them out, now what the hell kind of lunch do you think that was, the whole place staring at us and the waiter coming over to ask if anything is unsatisfactory. Do you think I wouldn't rather be right here? in my workroom with noodle soup and a peanut butter sandwich trying to clear up the second act of that play?

A long book deserves a long quote, and this excerpt is, though slightly more amusing, otherwise fairly representative of *JR*'s stylistic behavior. I would have no quarrel with the reader who found Gaddis entertaining because of bits like the grinning Chinese blowing out his nine dollar steak on his plate (though a touch of racism here?) and would admit to finding such moments scattered through the book, particularly when the speakers are harassed operators of an American high school, 1970's style:

—Adult ed, where is it, adult ed, I just saw it . . . he tugged under the web of wrinkles,—here. Home catering and slipcover making, that's it. We can put it all in east seven, east seven, where is it, to implement the, fit a whole washing machine in the space the Great Books take here it is, east seven, we've got the, it looks like we've got the retreads in there now, the . . .

—Retards that's supposed to be, that's the . . .

—Retards, right. A little trouble with your machine printout here Dan. Retards.

But, would you believe it, this sort of thing gets tiresome! And although Gaddis has already been praised for his marvelous ear, it suffers by not being set off against anything else (the few paragraphs of description are perfunctory); also since except for superficial differences (the character Whiteback keeps punctuating his words with a noise Gaddis renders as "Ahm"—"She, his wife, your wife that is to say Dan, orientationwise that is, I understand she's ahm motivating factor there activationwise she's probably talked to you about it")—everybody talks in the same artificial "broken" incoherence, as if some of us didn't every so often communicate

in impeccably finished sentences. It may well be that some readers of *JR* will be able to move through this cacophony and find it expressive (as "The Waste Land" was also found to be) of Modern Civilization and technological man. I found myself sinking or swimming in the sentences themselves, and eventually sank for good. I hope it won't be judged mere oneupsmanship to suggest that William Gaddis has written an old-fashioned modernist book, a monument surely.

Larry Woiwode's (he used to be L. W. Woiwode) new book I relievedly confess to having read all the way through, but over a too-long period of weeks during which it was put down too many times. No one can read this "family album" without encountering splendid stretches of writing, what can only be praised by hauling out worn words like respect for detail, seriousness of concern, being possessed by one's subject—growing up, growing old, birth and death, love and hate, North Dakota and Illinois. As when Woiwode's favorite, Charles Neimuller, son of Martin and Alpha, appears to be dying of double pneumonia:

His own voice is a dampened hum at the center of his head, and his lips, split by fever, taste like coins turning green. His bones are ice and the ice is wrapped with layers of flesh that burn but have no effect. His brain is a fluid that exerts pressure at the base of his nose and occasionally leaks from it, or runs rawly down his throat, and puts pressure behind his eyes, which are dry as paper. The band of pain constricting his chest strangles the air he breathes, and the shallow breaths he takes beneath the pain are becoming more shallow and rapid each hour.

Typing this out makes me realize how good it is. Yet I can't feel that the novelist is well-served by his form, in its inordinate length, in the hope that anything goes as long as it is somehow family-related. In particular a long italicized section of Alpha's diary, written before she marries Martin, should try the patience of all but the most committed.

Committed to what? The book begins with a "Prelude" in which Martin's son Tim remembers things past, the place where he grew up, in a tone which too often recalled to me *Our Town*. And for all Woiwode's inclusion of violent bits or extravagances, the pervading air is reverent, as if you need to breathe awfully deep and leisurely to be adequate to all that open space. As a nervous Easterner I've always been self-conscious about west-of-Chicago-rooted fiction, and still take Wright Morris to be the writer who cuts his reverence with enough cynicism and annoyance to make it palatable and more. Woiwode often reads like Morris without the humor, and I can't think this anything but a limitation, especially over the long stretches he chooses to operate within. Maybe Woiwode is the perfect novelist for those who can't stand Mailer's ego or are not amused by Gaddis' experimentality. He is surely the antidote to those, though I would question whether this largeness of scope, tolerance of Life however it's lived, doesn't have its own brand of overreaching. But then if one's reach doesn't exceed one's grasp, what's the point of writing American fiction?

A year ago I waded through Iris Murdoch's sixteenth novel (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*), vowing that it was the last Murdoch I'd attempt. Here was yet another and particularly tired version of the old Murdoch runaround, lovers falling into what should have been weird combinations but which, through excessive familiarity with previous novels hardly seemed weird at all. Yet lo and behold! unless I am much mistaken *A Word Child* is a marvelous book, the best novel she has written since (as I remember them) *A Severed Head* or *The Bell* or maybe even *Under The Net*.⁸ Trying to say why is not so easy, but one might start by mentioning the advantage—and for Miss Murdoch I think it is an advantage—of employing a first-person narrator who is a bit unpleasant, warped, full of unhealthy attitudes towards life. Bradley Pearson, the "I" who narrates *The Black Prince* was unpleasant enough, but also a Nabokovian stylist, and his soliloquies were sometimes unbearable though he helped raise the book to a more energetic level than any of her other recent ones.

The "I" of *A Word Child* is named Hilary Burde, with a burden of guilt lying heavily upon him and an absurdly over-organized life to compensate for it—he is a sort of cold, awful fellow who spaces his friends out over the week, hatefully controls his sister and mistress and friends, knows that everything is but a parody of meaning. Iris Murdoch moves him through the book like this:

It was just about daylight as I reached the office. Fog had swept over London during the night, not one of the thick great fogs, but something more like a sea mist, greyish, not brown, and carrying suspended in its gauzy being cold globules of water which lightly covered the overcoats of early Londoners with a spider's web of moisture which, in the warmth of tube trains and offices, turned the said overcoats into heavy steaming puddings.

Hilary is a verbal hotshot anyway so should be able to write descriptions at least this good; but Miss Murdoch puts her full energies on his side and creates a vivid and perverse sense of what you might do in London if you were really imaginative, or in desperate shape. Here Hilary describes his usual mode of self-entertainment after office hours (he is a bored civil servant in Whitehall):

After leaving the office I would travel either to Sloane Square or to Liverpool Street to have a drink in the station buffet. In the whole extension of the Underground system those two stations are, as far as I've been able to discover, the only ones which have bars actually upon the platform. . . . These two bars were not just a cozy after-the-office treat, they were the source of a dark excitement, places of profound communication with London, with the sources of Life, with the caverns of resignation to grief and to mortality.

This would be existential enough by itself, but Murdoch allows herself (or

⁸ A WORD CHILD, by Iris Murdoch. Viking Press. \$8.95.

Hilary if you will) to be carried away to the following extent of observation about the London Underground and its trains of consciousness:

... the stations, each unique, the sinister brightness of Charing Cross, the mysterious gloom of Regent's Park, the dereliction of Mornington Crescent, the futuristic melancholy of Moorgate, the monumental iron-work of Liverpool Street, the twining art nouveau of Gloucester Road, the Barbican sunk in a baroque hole, fit subject for Piranesi. And in summer, like an excursion into the country the flowering banks of the Westbound District Line. I preferred the dark however. . . I loved the Inner Circle best.

There is much more, but always located with great accuracy in the particular, as I trust anyone would be sympathetic to who knows what she means by the "dereliction" of Mornington Crescent station—it's closed on weekends and almost nobody is ever seen to get on or off there.

As for Murdoch's insights into the human heart, the nature of love, freedom and necessity, I don't really think they are explored to any more purpose than they were back in, say, *An Unofficial Rose*. Eliot said that the "plot" of a poem was but a sop to the reader, keeping him entertained while the real work went on elsewhere. Though *A Word Child* is no poem, I'm convinced it's marvelous because of the plenitude of London, the weather, morning and evening seen through the prejudiced lens of a troubled viewer like Hilary Burde. Iris Murdoch seems to have turned out to be, or maybe she always was, a writer who takes on deep themes, promises insights into the complexities of human motivation, but gives instead a wonderfully solid surface—especially fine things in Hyde Park /Kensington Gardens here—that is richly entertaining. Anybody lately afflicted with doubts about this novelist should test them against *A Word Child*.

In saying a few words about the final novel of Anthony Powell's *Music of Time* sequence it is hard to avoid an unnecessary bit of preaching to the converted, or alternatively a strident defense of how fine he really is.⁹ When I see that Clive James has said it is "going to be the greatest modern novel in English since *Ulysses*" I know I should stand back and raise a warning finger, but on completion of volume number 12 I really saw no way around mere total approval of the Jamesian pronouncement. Yes, if counted as one book, it is the greatest modern novel since *Ulysses*, and I am willing—as Joyce urged on his readers—to devote if not the rest at least a fair share of my future days to its perusal. So it may be worth dragging out Marvin Mudrick's unparalleled words in abuse of Powell. (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Spring, 1972) apropos *Books Do Furnish A Room* just to see what grand rage Powell can draw forth from a good reviewer:

Cobwebs and dishwater, condescension, malice, inertness, tics, false specification, simpering imprecision, endlessly unsorted gossip, on and

⁹ HEARING SECRET HARMONIES, by *Anthony Powell*. Little Brown np.

on and on, not preliminaries or bridge-passages but the staple, the thing itself, the world as a closetful of baseless opinions (even in dialogue Powell's characters are empty coats dangling on the coathangers of his opinions about them). . . .

What Mudrick abhors, I love—it seems to be as simple as that, and it must be that mainly I love the on and on and onness of it. Mudrick seems to think that calling the whole thing “the most interminable soap-opera since *Australopithecus*” is somehow a crushing thing to be said against it, rather than (for me, currently a devoted watcher of NBC's *Somerset*) one of the central things in its fictional favor.

But this is not the time to attempt summation and to claim that *Hearing Secret Harmonies* beautifully crowns the series. To devoted readers of Powell I would recommend James Tucker's highly amusing and (it must be) accurate alphabetical guide (in *New Review*, vol. 2, no. 17) to the twelve volumes. And to non-Powell readers who might be put off by a hostile assessment the likes of Mudrick's above, I will quote some dialogue, then a paragraph of description from the first section of the new, and last, book. Nick and his wife are visited by the daughter of mutual friends who has latched onto a sinister yet oddly compelling figure named Scorpio Murtlock, deeply into “Harmony” and other spiritual enterprises. The question is what to do with the afternoon, and Nick, having suggested they kill crayfish—to be found in the pools of a nearby brook—assures Murtlock that the act might be said to be in harmony with the elements, and not really a blood sport either (“Aggressive activities against crayfish might be, by definition, excluded from an afternoon's programme devoted to Harmony”). Murtlock replies:

“You mean that without blood there is no vehicle for the spirit?”

“I mean that you might not like killing.”

“I do not kill, if not killed.”

He seems glad to have an opportunity to make that statement, gnomic to say the least. . . .

“I don't think we'll be killed. Deaths crayfishing are comparatively rare.”

“You spoke not of death, but of killing.”

“The latter is surely apt to lead to the former?”

“There is no killing—death is an illusion.”

This was no help so far as deciding how the afternoon was to be spent.

“The point is whether or not you would consider the killing of crayfish to be in Harmony?”

Once more his smile made me feel that it was I, rather than he, who was being silly.

“Not all killing is opposed to Harmony.”

“Let's kill crayfish then.”

This is the way dialogue should read, a time-bomb in every assertion.

Nick, finding Scorpio hard to handle, resorts to increasingly stronger literary ironies and tricky allusions, as when a hawk swoops by and Murtlock asks whether they are common in these parts. Nick suggests this one is "Perhaps a retired kestrel from a 'Thirties poem." Then occurs the following paragraph.

The allusion might be obscure to one of his age. So much the better. Obscurity could be met with obscurity. A second later, either on the hawk's account, or from some other disturbing factor in their vicinity—the quarry end of the pond—the duck flew out again. Rising at an angle acute as their former descent, the flight took on at once the disciplined wedge-shaped configuration used in all duck transit, leader at apex, main body following behind in semblance of a fan. Mounting higher, still higher, soaring over copper and green beechwood, the birds achieved considerable altitude before a newly communicated command wheeled them off again in a fresh direction. Adjusting again to pattern, they receded into creamy cavernous billows of distant cloud, beyond which the evening sun drooped. Into this opaque glow of fire they disappeared. To the initiated, I reflected—to ancient soothsayers—the sight would have been vaticinary.

The sight would have been; the prose certainly is—as full of implication, tone and feeling as the dialogue quoted previous to it.

Along with prognostication and stand-off dialogue there are the authoritative bequeathments of age, seen through Nick Jenkins' advanced eyes: "Two compensations for growing old are worth putting on record as the condition asserts itself. The first is a vantage point gained for acquiring embellishments to narratives that have been unfolding for years beside one's own, trimmings that can even appear to supply the conclusion of a given story, though finality is never certain, a dimension always possible to add." *Hearing Secret Harmonies* is in this sense "trimmings," even though Widmerpool comes to a sad end, hoping to the very last to be known as just plain "Ken." In reviewing the book James Tucker suggests that "It is a slightly arrogant view of life, though, which has a cabal of Etonian school kids take a dislike to someone in Book 1, set him off on a trip of about a million words and have him finish sexually disorientated, politically corrupt, mentally diseased." To which I would only reply, Up slightly arrogant views of life! Widmerpool should have been so lucky, his existence (like the young man carbuncular's, but so much more interesting) confirmed in my imagination forever. The last two words of the book may be revealed without ruining its end—they are, "wintry silence." Finishing it on the back porch in unseasonably mild weather a month or so ago, I may have realized what it all augured. Vaticinary indeed.

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